

THE PRICK OF A THORN

***COPING WITH THE TRIALS AND
TRIBULATIONS OF LIFE***

Dr. Aisha Utz



IN THE NAME OF

ALLAH

THE ALL-COMPASSIONATE, ALL-MERCIFUL

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PRONUNCIATION AND TRANSLITERATION CHART

| Arabic script | Pronunciation | Trans- literated form |
|---------------|--|--|
| ا | short 'a', as in <i>cat</i> | a |
| آ — ئ | longer 'a', as in <i>cab</i> (not as in <i>cake</i>) | â |
| ب | /b/ as in <i>bell</i> , <i>rubber</i> and <i>tab</i> | b |
| ت | /t/ as in <i>tap</i> , <i>mustard</i> and <i>sit</i> | t |
| ة | takes the sound of the preceding diacritical mark sometimes ending in h (when in pausal form): ah, ih or ooh; or atu(n), ati(n) or ata(n) when uninterrupted | h or t (when followed by another Arabic word) |
| ث | /th/ as in <i>thing</i> , <i>maths</i> and <i>wealth</i> | th |
| ج | /j/ as in <i>jam</i> , <i>ajar</i> and <i>age</i> | j |
| ح | a 'harsher' sound than the English initial /h/, and may occur medially and in word-final position as well | h |
| خ | as in <i>Bach</i> (in German); may occur initially and medially as well | kh |
| د | /d/ as in <i>do</i> , <i>muddy</i> and <i>red</i> | d |
| ذ | as in <i>this</i> , <i>father</i> and <i>smooth</i> | dh |

| Arabic script | Pronunciation | Trans-literated form |
|---------------|--|----------------------|
| ر | /r/ as in <i>raw</i> , <i>arid</i> and <i>war</i> ; may also be a rolled 'r', as pronounced in Spanish | r |
| ز | /z/ as in <i>zoo</i> , <i>easy</i> and <i>gaze</i> | z |
| س | /s/ as in <i>so</i> , <i>messy</i> and <i>grass</i> | s |
| ش | as in <i>ship</i> , <i>ashes</i> and <i>rush</i> | sh |
| ص | no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /sw/ or /s/ farther back in the mouth | ʃ |
| ض | no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /d/ farther back in the mouth | ɖ |
| ط | no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /t/ farther back in the mouth | ɟ |
| ظ | no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing 'the' farther back in the mouth | dh |
| ع | no close equivalent in English: a guttural sound in the back of the throat | ʕ |
| غ | no close equivalent in English, but may be closely approximated by pronouncing it like the French /r/ in 'rouge' | gh |
| ف | /f/ as in <i>fill</i> , <i>effort</i> and <i>muff</i> | f |

| Arabic script | Pronunciation | Trans-literated form |
|---------------|---|--------------------------------|
| ق | no close equivalent in English, but may be approximated by pronouncing it as /k/ farther back in the mouth | q |
| ك | /k/ as in <i>king</i> , <i>buckle</i> and <i>tack</i> | k |
| ل | /l/ as in <i>lap</i> , <i>halo</i> ; in the word Allah, it becomes velarized as in <i>ball</i> | l |
| م | /m/ as in <i>men</i> , <i>simple</i> and <i>ram</i> | m |
| ن | /n/ as in <i>net</i> , <i>ant</i> and <i>can</i> | n |
| هـ - و - ا | /h/ as in <i>hat</i> ; unlike /h/ in English, in Arabic /h/ is pronounced in medial and word-final positions as well | h |
| و | as in <i>wet</i> and <i>away</i> | w |
| و | long 'u', as in <i>boot</i> and <i>too</i> | oo |
| ي | as in <i>yard</i> and <i>mayo</i> | y |
| ي | long 'e', as in <i>eat</i> , <i>beef</i> and <i>see</i> | ee |
| ء | glottal stop: may be closely approximated by pronouncing it like 't' in the Cockney English pronunciation of <i>butter</i> : <i>bu'er</i> , or the stop sound in <i>uh-oh</i> ! | '(omitted in initial position) |

Diphthongs

| Arabic script | Pronunciation | Trans-literated form |
|---------------|---|----------------------|
| أو، و | long 'o', as in <i>owe</i> , <i>boat</i> and <i>go</i> | au, aw |
| أي، ي | long 'a', as in <i>aid</i> , <i>rain</i> and <i>say</i> | ay, ai, ei |

Diacritical marks (tashkeel)

| Name of mark | Pronunciation | Trans-literated form |
|--------------|--|----------------------|
| fatḥah | very short 'a' or schwa (unstressed vowel) | a |
| kasrah | shorter version of ee or schwa (unstressed vowel) | i |
| ḍammah | shorter version of oo | u |
| shaddah | a doubled consonant is stressed in the word, and the length of the sound is also doubled | double letter |
| sukoon | no vowel sound between consonants or at the end of a word | absence of vowel |

ARABIC HONORIFIC SYMBOLS

| | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--|
| (ﷻ) | <i>Subḥānahu wa Ta'ālā</i> | The Exalted |
| (ﷺ) | <i>ṣalla Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam</i> | Blessings and peace be upon him |
| (ﷺ) | <i>'alayhi as-salām</i> | May peace be upon him |
| (ﷺ) | <i>raḍiya Allāhu 'anhu</i> | May Allah be pleased with him |
| (ﷺ) | <i>raḍiya Allāhu 'anhâ</i> | May Allah be pleased with her |
| (ﷺ) | <i>raḍiya Allāhu 'anhumâ</i> | May Allah be pleased with both of them |
| (ﷺ) | <i>raḍiya Allāhu 'anhum</i> | May Allah be pleased with all of them |
| (ﷺ) | <i>raḍiya Allāhu 'anhunna</i> | May Allah be pleased with all of them (females only) |

HADITH GRADE TERMS

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Sound: | <i>ṣaḥeḥ</i> |
| Reliable: | <i>ḥasan</i> |
| Weak: | <i>ḍa'eef</i> |
| Odd: | <i>ghareeb</i> |
| Authentic: | includes sound, reliable, or any grade in between |
| Acceptable: | <i>sakat 'anhu</i> ; the grader of the hadith did not comment on it, meaning that he found nothing unacceptable in it |

ABOUT THE WORD 'LORD'

The word lord in English has several related meanings. The original meaning is 'master' or 'ruler', and in this sense it is often used to refer to human beings: 'the lord of the mansion' or 'Lord So-and-So' (in the United Kingdom, for example). The word *Lord* with a capital L is used in the lexicon of Islam to refer to the One and Only God — Allah. In Islam, there is no ambiguity about the meaning of this word. While it is true that one may occasionally use the word *lord* (whether capitalized or not) to refer to a human being, in Islamic discourse the reference of this term is always clear from the context. Whereas for Christians, Hindus and other polytheists, the word *Lord* with a capital L may refer to Allah, to Jesus or to some imagined deity, for Muslims, there can be no plurality of meaning. Allah alone is the Lord, and the Lord is Allah — not Jesus, not Rama, not any other being.

The Editor

WHEN JIHAD REFERS TO FIGHTING

Although jihad is often translated into English as 'holy war', it must be noted that war has never been described as 'holy' in any of Islam's primary texts or even early Islamic literature. Linguistically speaking, jihad is an Islamic term that applies to a broad spectrum of activities, ranging from daily striving to meet the day's challenges, to the striving against one's desires and self, to the struggle to provide for one's family. Its basic definition is 'the act of striving or struggling in the way of Allah'. Therefore, jihad is not limited to war; it includes struggling with one's soul, speech, body and wealth so that the message of Allah reaches all humans willing to receive it.

Islamic scholars have referred to different types of jihad, such as jihad against the self (to understand Islam, act upon it, call others to it and be patient with the difficulties of making this call), jihad against the Devil (repelling Satanic whispers, doubts and lusts), jihad against the tongue (controlling it, using it to enjoin what is good, forbid what is wrong, spread the correct teachings of Islam and answer false ideologies), jihad against aggression with the purpose of protecting Islam and the lives, honour and property of Muslims) and other types of jihad like jihad against the hypocrites, jihad against oppressors and jihad against mischief makers.

Jihad — in the context of fighting — has specific rules and conditions that need to be met before jihad is initiated. The first rule is that people are not to be fought because of what they believe, or to coerce them to accept Islam. The second rule is to 'fight only those who fight you' and never initiate unprovoked aggression (*Qur'an* 2:

190). That means that Muslims are only allowed to fight back, rather than initiating fighting; but 'fighting back' includes fighting against actual aggression as well as proactively addressing real threats of aggression. In both cases, Muslims are instructed to be prepared and ready to defend their nation before they actually engage in military conflict. There are additional conditions, but the above-mentioned conditions are vital for putting jihad in its broader meaning in the proper context.

Another condition of the sort of jihad which involves fighting is that it should take place only under an Islamic authority that 'raises the banner' for such jihad. It is not following the Sunnah at all for any individual or self-appointed group of Muslims to wage war on behalf of a nation. Instead, Muslims should be united under the single authority of an imam or khaleefah (caliph), except in the case where an individual needs to defend his own family and property, or to help his neighbour to do so. This is proved by the example of the early Muslims as well as texts in the *Qur'an* and the Sunnah:

«When there comes to them [the hypocrites] a matter related to [public] safety or fear, they spread it about; if only they had referred it to the Messenger and to such of them as are in authority, those among them who are able to think through the matter would have understood it.» (*Qur'an* 4: 83)

«Hudhayfah ibn Yaman asked the Prophet (ﷺ): What if (the Muslims) have no single leader (they are divided into disputing groups)? The Prophet (ﷺ) answered: If they have no single leader or unified group, then leave all these disputing groups, even if you have to bite on a tree until your death.» [part of a longer hadith recorded by Bukhari]

There are other conditions for jihad. In general, the rules laid out for war in Islam should be upheld unless there is some legitimate need or strategy when fighting occurs that would necessitate going against those rules. A Muslim should not kill himself or herself (*Qur'an* 4: 29) nor kill another Muslim, except by accident (*Qur'an* 4: 92). Women,

children, the elderly and other non-combatants should not be harmed. Land should not be destroyed, nor trees cut down. Corpses should not be mutilated. Islam should not be imposed upon non-believers. Rather, if combatant non-Muslims choose on their own to embrace Islam, even if only as a deceitful trick, it should be accepted by the Muslim leadership, and fighting should stop. Peace should be sought before lives are lost. Treaties and agreements should be upheld. Prisoners should be well-treated. Above all, justice must be done.

﴿Fight in the path [according to the rules set by Allah] of Allah only those who fight you, but do not commit aggression [transgress limits]. Allah does not love aggressors. ...And fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is [freely embraced] for [the individual's faith in] Allah. But if they desist, then let there be no aggression except against transgressors.﴾ (Qur'an 2: 190, 193)

﴿Allah does not forbid you from being good, kind, just, and fair to those who have not fought you because of religion nor driven you from your homeland. Allah loves those who are just. Allah forbids you from giving allegiance to those who have fought you because of religion and have driven you from your homeland, and those who supported your expulsion...﴾ (Qur'an 60: 8-9)

In addition, the Muslim nation is encouraged to maintain strong military capabilities to promote justice and to deter acts of war and aggression.

﴿And make ready for them [their potential aggression] all you can of power, including steeds of war, to deter the enemy of Allah and your enemy, and others besides, whom you may not know but whom Allah knows.﴾ (Qur'an 8: 60)

The Editor

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

All praise and thanks belong to Allah alone, the One, the Almighty and All-Merciful. Blessings and peace be upon Prophet Muhammad, the last of His messengers and prophets, and upon his family, his Companions and all those who follow in his footsteps until the end of time.

Every individual in this world undergoes some degree of trial and tribulation, whether physical, spiritual, economic, social, or psychological. One would be hard-pressed to find a person who has not undergone some form of trial or suffered some loss. Although individuals go through similar trials, they respond in different ways. This is where this book comes in!

Dr. Aisha Utz, who has already published two best-sellers with IIPH, returns with another straight-to-the-heart text, this time showing how to reap numerous rewards through everyday trials. She emphasizes that hardships can actually be beneficial in that they serve to expiate sins, boost spiritual development, purify the soul, and earn great rewards — as long as individuals respond to them appropriately. *The Prick of a Thorn* describes easy-to-implement coping strategies that were developed in the light of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

May Allah accept the efforts of all those who contributed to the production of this book, and may it be acceptable to Him, *âmeen*.

Muhammad Abdul Mohsin Al-Tuwaijri
Managing Director
International Islamic Publishing House
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. All praises are for Allah (*subhânahu wa Ta'âlâ* - Glorified and Exalted is He). We praise Him, seek His help, and beseech His forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from the evil of our souls and the evil of our deeds. Whomsoever Allah guides, no one can lead astray; whomsoever He allows to go astray, no one can guide. I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah, with whom there is no partner. I also bear witness that Muhammad (*ṣalla Allâhu 'alayhi wa sallam* - blessings and peace be upon him) is His servant and His Messenger.

As a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist, I have dealt with a number of Muslim clients over the years. They have suffered from various tribulations in their lives, ranging from the common stress and strains of work, family and university studies to the serious illness of a child or the loss of a loved one. Their coping techniques and responses vary, but the power inherent in the Islamic approach to comprehending and dealing with tribulations has been strikingly apparent. The outcome, however, frequently depends upon the client's level of faith and religious commitment.

One encounter, informal in nature, stands out in my mind. A Muslim professional, whom I had met just after beginning a new position in the university, requested a private meeting with me. As we settled into her office, she began to share the story of her young daughter, who had been suffering for several years from a serious, potentially fatal medical condition. She proceeded to describe the treatments, surgeries, and recurring visits to medical specialists, sometimes in other countries. As she related the details of her story,

she burst into tears and expressed intense feelings of guilt and grief. She was plagued by nagging suspicions that she might be responsible for her daughter's illness, that she was being punished by Allah for misdeeds that she may have committed. She had been suffering some mild symptoms of depression, and these were beginning to interfere with her ability to function normally at work and at home. Doctors had suggested that her daughter undergo yet another surgery, one that was potentially life-threatening, and she doubted whether she could cope with the added stress of such an event.

I spent an hour with her, counselling her from an Islamic perspective and proposing various explanations and coping mechanisms, while also integrating Qur'anic verses and hadiths (statements or actions of Prophet Muhammad [ﷺ]) into the conversation where appropriate. The outcome of that hour-long session was truly amazing. Due to the level of her faith, she readily responded to my suggestions and took to heart what I had to say. While she primarily required some clarification, reminders, and redirection, the effect was profound. I spoke to her again, a week or so later, and she reported that she was functioning well. She thanked me for what I had done. I reminded her that all thanks belong to Allah, Who has provided us with these gifts.

While the process and the outcomes do not always come this easily, the lessons from this story are palpable. The issue is not really the ordeal itself; what is important instead is our understanding of it and the methods that we employ to deal with it. As a comprehensive approach to life, Islam offers all that we need to effectively cope with the difficulties that will inevitably come our way in life; the Islamic approach encompasses cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and communal responses. The answers are already out there, but we, as human beings, need to actively seek and utilize them. Unfortunately, it seems that Muslims, despite having the answers in their very own hands, often fail to recognize or take advantage of the intrinsic potential of Allah's guidance.

These experiences, along with the recognition of the multitude and magnitude of tribulations faced by the human race in current times, led to the formulation of the ideas and the outline for this work. The general purpose of this book is to provide an Islamic framework for understanding the trials and the tribulations that we experience in this worldly life, and also to propose various solutions for responding to and coping with these hardships. It is through the lens of Islam that we come to appreciate the wisdom, justice, and mercy that Allah has for His creatures in the seemingly stormy and vast ocean of successive tribulations and in an apparently chaotic and violent world. We cannot grasp the concept of Allah's *qadr* (divine will and predestination)¹ until we realize that He has decreed every single event in our lives, as He reminds us:

﴿ مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ يُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ قَلْبَهُ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ۝۱۱ ﴾
(سورة التغابن: ۱۱)

«No disaster strikes except by permission of Allah. Whoever believes in Allah – He will guide his heart, and Allah is Knowing of all things.»
(Qur'an 64: 11)²

﴿ مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرَأَهَا إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ۝۲۳ لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَى مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا ءَاتَاكُمْ ... ۝۲۲ ﴾
(سورة الحديد: ۲۲-۲۳)

«No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves except that it is in a register before We bring it into being — indeed that, for Allah,

¹ Wherever possible, Arabic terms have been translated into English. In cases where we have chosen to retain the Arabic, the transliterated word or phrase is shown in italics the first time it appears in the text; the term is also defined in the glossary found at the end of this book. (Editor)

² The translations of the meanings of the verses of the Qur'an in this book have been taken, with some changes, from Saheeh International, *The Qur'an: Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings*. (Editor)

is easy — in order that you not despair over what has eluded you and not exult [in pride] over what He has given you...»

(Qur'an 57: 22-23)

We will also begin to appreciate the reality that Allah only decrees what is **good** for human beings. Each and every trial and tribulation contains some element of **goodness** for us; whether it is the death of a child, the loss of a job, poverty, or devastation, it is **good** for us in some way. It is only through this awareness that we break free from the fear, pain, despair, and psychological turmoil that plagues humankind. The path to freedom is paved by following the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the practice and collected sayings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) while accompanied by patience, acceptance, gratitude, and submission as our travelling companions. This book attempts to outline that path and to offer fellow Muslims the means to find solace and refuge from the storm.

I thank and praise Allah for giving me the inspiration, opportunity and ability to complete this work, for nothing can be accomplished without His will and His assistance. I pray that He accepts my effort as being purely for His sake and that He forgives my shortcomings and any errors that may have occurred during this process. I pray also that this effort benefits those who read it and assists them in understanding the wisdom behind trials and tribulations and how to cope with them based upon the Qur'an and the Sunnah of our Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). May Allah guide us to the discovery of these pearls of wisdom (often hidden at great depths and extracted only after intense effort) that are contained within His magnificent religion.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book could not have been completed without Allah's aid and guidance, and to Allah belongs all praise. After Allah, I would also like to extend my appreciation to all those who have assisted in this effort. In particular, I would like to thank International Islamic Publishing House for publishing the book, and the editors at IIPH for their proficiency, assistance, and advice throughout the process. I would also like to thank Darussalam Publishers and Distributors and the Islamic Texts Society for their kind permission to quote from their published works.

INTRODUCTION: THE NATURE OF THIS LIFE

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Every fatigue, illness, distress, worry, grief, or harm that befalls the Muslim, including **the prick of a thorn**, will be accepted by Allah as expiation for some of his or her sins.» (Bukhari)³

If only this were restricted to suffering as inconsequential as the prick of a thorn... but Allah informs us that our existence on this earth is destined to be a constant series of trials and tribulations, hardships and challenges:

﴿لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ﴾ (سورة البلد: ٤)
«We have certainly created man into hardship.» (Qur'an 90: 4)

One only needs to watch half an hour of international news to grasp this reality. Wars, natural disasters,⁴ crimes, sickness, death — the list is unending. If not for the unassailable belief in the wisdom of Allah, one would certainly fall into deep despair.

³ All hadiths in this text have been checked and verified by IIPH's researchers. It is rare, but it does happen that a hadith is not verifiable within the timeframe of researching and editing the book. In that case, a decision is made by the editorial board whether or not to include the hadith. It is IIPH's policy not to include weak hadiths or fabricated (fake) hadiths in our publications. If a weak hadith is included in any text, it is usually because the author of the book discusses it as a weak hadith. (Editor)

⁴ The term 'natural disaster' implies the cause to be natural forces (rather than human actions). As Muslims, we believe that Allah is the ultimate owner of all that happens in this world, and nothing happens without His permission.

In fact, the level of suffering and misery in the world seems to be rising. Research has indicated that the frequency and severity of natural disasters have increased,⁵ and so have their devastation and destruction. According to the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters of the United Nations Development Program, during the period 2000 to 2009:

1. Nearly 4,000 disasters were recorded,
2. More than 780,000 people died,
3. More than two billion people were affected, and
4. Economic losses were an estimated USD 960 billion.⁶

Wars, with their 'weapons of mass destruction', create precisely the type of destruction and human suffering that their name implies — not only for soldiers but also for innocent women, children, and elderly persons. In reality, the anguish of victims in this latter category equals or exceeds that of the combatants themselves, through no choice of their own. The physical, psychological, and social suffering continues for years beyond the actual event.

Trials and tribulations are not limited to the physical realm. They also occur in the form of doubts and desires, and through following other than what Allah has ordained. The banners of democracy, nationalism, secularism, feminism, and 'Westernization' are all varieties of tribulations that play upon the minds and souls of Muslims in an attempt to corrupt them with disbelief, polytheism, and religious innovations. The Sharia (Islamic law) itself has been forgotten in many Muslim countries, having been replaced by secular, human-made laws.

⁵ Emmanuelle Bournay, "Trends in natural disasters," UNEP/GRID-Arendal, <http://maps.grida.no/go/graphic/trends-in-natural-disasters> (accessed February 7, 2011). These include earthquakes, hurricanes, volcanoes, floods, storms, fires, drought, and landslides.

⁶ United Nations Development Programme, "Crisis Prevention & Recovery," United Nations Development Programme, http://www.undp.org/cpr/we_do/integrating_risk.shtml (accessed February 7, 2011).

With the global influence of the media, via satellite TV and the Internet, the danger spreads imperceptibly throughout the Ummah (the entire global community of Muslims), weakening it bit by bit like a poison.

The enticement for women to leave their homes and families in order to study and work in mixed-gender settings and to exhibit their beauty and charm to unrelated men is another modern-day tribulation that is being promoted by various world organizations, governments, and transnational corporations who have in mind something other than the true interests of women and families. Unsuspecting, brainwashed women are falling into this trap in ever-increasing numbers as the Ummah awaits the ominous consequences that are bound to transpire, mimicking the deterioration of the Western society. All this is done primarily for the sake of materialism, another poison that has tainted the Muslim lands.

Even more disturbing than the tribulations themselves are the responses and coping methods employed by the victims. Regrettably, many Muslims lack insight into the true purpose of tribulations and the opportunities that they present for spiritual growth and development. These individuals fail to purify their worship and their souls, obstinately refusing to repent to and beseech their Lord, the only One Who can remove their trials and alleviate their suffering. As a result, they end up experiencing even greater levels of hardship and distress.

And the list continues...

In the middle of all this is Islam. It is the only religion or belief system that provides a definitive, comprehensive, and effective approach for comprehending, preventing, and coping with such ordeals. It offers solutions for the most complex and arduous of life's problems. Without this solid framework, individuals may question how a just and a merciful God could cause or allow such horrendous anguish and misery; consequently, they risk becoming atheists. One hears of this happening, despite the stark reality that falling into

Satan's trap of atheism and disbelief is far more horrifying than any pain a person may be required to bear in this fleeting life.

This book attempts to provide an inclusive understanding of the ongoing trials and tribulations that we will inevitably face during our existence in this world. It covers the conceptualization of trials and tribulations from an Islamic perspective; it explains the various types of tribulations, along with their purposes, benefits, and primary causes; and it presents examples from the stories of the prophets of Allah (peace be upon them all). A primary focus of the book is on providing suggestions, based upon the Qur'an and the Sunnah, for responding to and coping with the trials and the tribulations. It also mentions the rewards for those who endeavour to implement these recommendations in their lives. The possibilities are plentiful and diverse, ranging from supplicating to Allah to increasing good deeds, and from remembering death and the hereafter to strengthening the bonds of brotherhood. Let us embark now upon our journey of discovery.

Definitions

An Arabic term often used for trials is *fitnah* (plural: *fitan*), the linguistic meaning of which is temptation, trial, and affliction. It can also carry the meaning of discord and dissension. The root word is *fatana*, which means to subject to temptations or trials.⁷ This particular meaning of trial and tribulation is used in the Qur'an in several places:

﴿كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَبَلَّوْكُمْ بِالْشَّرِّ وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ﴾ (سورة الأنبياء: ٣٥)

﴿Every soul will taste death. We test you with evil and with good as trial [fitnah]; and to Us you will be returned.﴾ (Qur'an 21: 35)

⁷ Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 695.

﴿...وَجَعَلْنَا بَعْضَكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ فِتْنَةً أَتَصْبِرُونَ وَكَانَ رَبُّكَ بَصِيرًا﴾ (سورة الفرقان: ٢٠)

﴿...And We have made some of you [people] as trial [fitnah] for others — will you have patience? Ever is your Lord, Seeing.﴾

(Qur'an 25: 20)

In the noble Qur'an, the term *fitnah* also bears the meaning of punishment and burning in the fire, as Allah warns:

﴿ذُوقُوا فِتْنَتَكُمْ هَذَا الَّذِي كُنتُمْ بِهِ تَسْتَعْجِلُونَ﴾ (سورة الذاريات: ١٤)

﴿[And will be told]: Taste your torment [fitnah, or punishment]. This is that for which you were impatient.﴾

(Qur'an 51: 14)

﴿إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهَا فِتْنَةً لِلظَّالِمِينَ﴾ (سورة الصافات: ٦٣)

﴿Indeed, We have made it a torment [fitnah, or punishment] for the wrongdoers.﴾

(Qur'an 37: 63)

The punishment in the aforementioned verse refers to a tree in the hellfire whose fruits are shaped like devils' heads and from which the inhabitants will eat to fill their stomachs.

Fitnah also has other meanings in the Qur'an, including disbelief and polytheism. In the verses that call for jihad (striving in the cause of Allah), Allah commands:

﴿وَأَقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ تَقْبَلُوهُمْ وَأَخْرِجُوهُمْ مِّنْ حَيْثُ أَخْرَجُوكُمْ وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ...﴾ (سورة البقرة: ١٩١)

﴿And kill them wherever you overtake them and expel them from wherever they have expelled you, and fitnah is worse than killing...﴾

(Qur'an 2: 191)

The term *fitnah* in this verse carries the meaning of disbelief and polytheism. Jihad involves killing and shedding the blood of other human beings, but Allah indicates that their disbelief, associating

partners with Him in worship, and hindering others from His path are far greater evils than killing.⁸

In a later verse, Allah also clarifies the goal of jihad:

﴿وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ لِلَّهِ فَإِنْ أَنْتَهُوا فَلَا عُدْوَانَ إِلَّا عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ﴾
(سورة البقرة: ١٩٣)

«Fight them until there is no [more] fitnah and [until] worship is [acknowledged to be] for Allah. But if they cease, then there is to be no aggression except against the oppressors.» (Qur'an 2: 193)

Therefore, the fundamental purpose of jihad is to eradicate disbelief and polytheism, and to make the religion of Allah dominant upon the earth, above all other religions.

The term fitnah is also used in the sense of testing gold and silver when they are melted under heat, to distinguish the pure parts from the impure.⁹ The term fitnah was used for the process of purifying metals by heating them. The blacksmith would heat the metal to a certain temperature to melt off specific impurities, and then he would raise the temperature higher to melt off other impurities. This process would continue until the original ore was purified. This provides an analogy for one of the purposes of trials and tribulations, which is to distinguish the believers from the disbelievers, the truthful from the liars, and the pure from the impure. It also symbolizes the purification of belief and submission from polytheism, disobedience, ignorance, and other forms of spiritual impurity.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) alluded to this particular meaning when he said about fever:

«Do not revile fever, for it takes away the sins of the sons of Adam, just as the bellows take away the dross of iron.» (Muslim)

⁸ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 1:528-529. IIPH uses the spelling 'Ibn Katheer'. (Editor)

⁹ Saleh as-Saleh, "The Contemporary Fitan: Afflictions, Trials, Tests, Tribulations," Abdurrahman.org, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/TheContemporaryFitan.pdf> (accessed February 3, 2011).

Bellows are used to increase the amount of air for the fire that is being used to melt the metal. The dross consists of the impurities that are mixed with the pure metal but which must be removed.

Some other words used in the Arabic language for trials and tribulations are *balâ'*, *ibtilâ'*, and *baliya*, which carry the meanings of affliction, misfortune, calamity, and distress. They come from the verb *bala* or *balwa*, which means to try, to put to test, or to afflict.¹⁰ Variations of these words are used in several places in the Qur'an. For example, consider the following verses:

﴿الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

(سورة الملك: ٢)

«[He] who created death and life to test you [*yabluwakum*] [as to] which of you is best in deed — and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving.» (Qur'an 67: 2)

﴿إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لِّهَا لِنَبْلُوهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا﴾

(سورة الكهف: ٧)

«Indeed, We have made that which is on the earth adornment for it that We may test them [*nabluwahum*] [as to] which of them is best in deed.» (Qur'an 18: 7)

In three different verses, one finds the following phrase:

﴿...وَفِي ذَٰلِكُمْ بَلَاءٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ﴾

«...And in that was a great trial [*balâ'*] from your Lord.»

(Qur'an 2: 49, 7: 141, and 14: 6)

It is interesting to note that all three verses refer to the trial caused by the Pharaoh, specifically his killing the newborn sons of Israel while allowing their daughters to live. This was indeed a great test for the children of Israel.

¹⁰ Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 75.

Another term that is often used with reference to trials and tribulations is *muṣeebah* (pl. *maṣā'ib* or *muṣeebāt*), which means misfortune, calamity, or disaster. *Iṣābah* (pl. *iṣābāt*) specifically means the state or process of being afflicted by a disease, an illness, or an accident.¹¹

﴿مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ...﴾ (سورة التغابن: ١١)

﴿No disaster [muṣeebah] strikes except by permission of Allah...﴾
(Qur'an 64: 11)

﴿مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرَاهَا إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ﴾ (سورة الحديد: ٢٢)

﴿No disaster [muṣeebah] strikes upon the earth or among yourselves except that it is in a register before We bring it into being. Indeed that, for Allah, is easy.﴾
(Qur'an 57: 22)

Reality of trials and tribulations

The journey begins with the realization that trials and tribulations are unavoidable components of life. This world is a place of struggle and striving, whereas the hereafter is the dwelling of reward or punishment. No human being who has ever existed, who exists today, or who will exist in the future can avoid the inevitable; not even the prophets and the most righteous among us are able to do so. In fact, they are tested to an even greater extent. Our life on this earth has been destined to be just that: a life of tests to determine who will submit to Allah and who will refuse. Allah reminds us:

﴿هَلْ أَتَى عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ حِينٌ مِنَ الدَّهْرِ لَمْ يَكُنْ شَيْئًا مَذْكُورًا﴾ (١) ﴿إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا﴾ (٢) ﴿إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا﴾ (٣)

(سورة الإنسان: ١-٣)

¹¹ Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 529.

﴿Has there [not] come upon man a period of time when he was not a thing [even] mentioned? Indeed, We created man from a sperm-drop mixture that We may try him; and We made him hearing and seeing. Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful.﴾

(Qur'an 76: 1-3)

This verse makes it evident that one of the reasons that we were created was to be tested in order to ascertain who will fulfil his or her ultimate purpose in life (to worship Allah) and to determine who will be grateful to Allah for His mercy and His blessings. Allah informs us:

﴿وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ حَتَّى نَعْلَمَ الْمُجْتَهِدِينَ مِنْكُمْ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَنَبْلُوَ أَخْبَارَكُمْ﴾ (سورة محمد: ٣١)

(سورة محمد: ٣١)

﴿And We will surely test you until We make evident those who strive among you [for the cause of Allah] and the patient, and We will test your affairs.﴾
(Qur'an 47: 31)

﴿إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لَهَا لِنَبْلُوَهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا﴾ (سورة الكهف: ٧)

(سورة الكهف: ٧)

﴿Indeed, We have made that which is on the earth adornment for it that We may test them [as to] which of them is best in deed.﴾

(Qur'an 18: 7)

﴿أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِكُمْ مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ مَسَّتْهُمُ الْبَأْسَاءُ وَالضَّرَاءُ وَزُلْزِلُوا حَتَّى يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مَعَهُ مَتَى نَصْرُ اللَّهِ أَلَا إِنَّ نَصْرَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ﴾ (سورة البقرة: ٢١٤)

﴿Or do you think that you will enter paradise while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you? They were touched by poverty and hardship and were shaken until [even their] messenger and those who believed with him said: When is the help of Allah? Unquestionably, the help of Allah is near.﴾

(Qur'an 2: 214)

Another term that is often used with reference to trials and tribulations is *muṣeebah* (pl. *maṣâ'ib* or *muṣeebât*), which means misfortune, calamity, or disaster. *Iṣâbah* (pl. *iṣâbât*) specifically means the state or process of being afflicted by a disease, an illness, or an accident.¹¹

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(سورة الإنسان: ١-٣)

¹¹ Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 529.

«Has there [not] come upon man a period of time when he was not a thing [even] mentioned? Indeed, We created man from a sperm-drop mixture that We may try him; and We made him hearing and seeing. Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful.»

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(سورة الكهف: ٧)

«Indeed, We have made that which is on the earth adornment for it that We may test them [as to] which of them is best in deed.»
(Qur'an 18: 7)

﴿أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تُدْخَلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِكُمْ مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ مَسَّتْهُمُ الْبَأْسَاءُ وَالضَّرَاءُ وَزُلْزِلُوا حَتَّى يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مَعَهُ مَتَى نَصْرُ اللَّهِ أَلَا إِنَّ نَصْرَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ﴾ (٢١٤)

(سورة البقرة: ٢١٤)

«Or do you think that you will enter paradise while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you? They were touched by poverty and hardship and were shaken until [even their] messenger and those who believed with him said: When is the help of Allah? Unquestionably, the help of Allah is near.»

(Qur'an 2: 214)

«‘Abdullâh (*radiya Allâhu ‘anhu* — may Allah be pleased with him) reported: The Prophet (ﷺ) drew a square; then he drew a line in the middle of it and extended that outside the square. He then drew several small lines attached to the central line, and he said: This is the human being. This (the square) is his lease of life (his day of death), which encircles him from all sides (or has encircled him); this (line) outside (the square) is his hope; and these small lines are the calamities and troubles (that may befall him). If one misses him, another will overtake him, and if that one misses him, a third will overtake him.» (Bukhari)

Thus, during our existence in this world, we alternate between periods of happiness and sadness, strength and weakness, health and sickness, wealth and poverty. This alternation continues until the moment of our death, which is awaiting us. If one calamity misses us, another one will overtake us; this is all according to the will and decree of Allah.

The first trial of humankind

The origin of trials and tribulations for humankind can be traced to its creation. Adam (*‘alayhi as-salâm* — peace be upon him) and Ḥawwâ’ (also known as Eve) were the first humans to be created and also the first to be tested, indicating that Allah had ordained trials and tribulations to be part of the human experience. Adam and Ḥawwâ’ were tested in regard to their obedience to Allah, but Satan came to lead them astray, as Allah relates:

﴿وَقُلْنَا يَتَادُمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾ فَأَزَلَّهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ عَنْهَا فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِ وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتْنَعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ﴿٣٦﴾ فَتَلَقَّىٰ آدَمُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٣٧﴾ قُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ

مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنْ تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾﴾ (سورة البقرة: ٣٥-٣٩)

«And We said: O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in paradise and eat therefrom in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will, but do not approach this tree lest you be among the wrongdoers. But Satan caused them to slip out of it and removed them from that [condition] in which they had been. We said: Go down [all of you] as enemies to one another, and you will have upon the earth a place of settlement and provision for a time... We said: Go down from it, all of you. And when guidance comes to you from Me, whoever follows My guidance — there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve. And those who disbelieve and deny Our signs — those will be companions of the fire; they will abide therein eternally.» (Qur'an 2: 35-39)

These verses clearly signify that the principal test presented to humans is one of obedience and submission to Allah. Those who succeed in this test by submitting to Allah and following His guidance will be rewarded with paradise, whereas those who refuse to submit and instead deny His guidance will be punished in the hellfire. This testing, spanning thousands of years, has continued from the time of Adam and Ḥawwâ’ to the present day.

The wisdom, justice and mercy of tribulations

From the Islamic perspective, tribulations are not meant to oppress individuals. Instead, their aim is to enable people to realize the truth about their existence and their potential for spiritual growth. Although they may appear to be evil or bad on the surface, tribulations are, in reality, good and beneficial. Out of His mercy, Allah ordains only goodness for human beings.

Despite our perceptions, it is not true that the world is chaotic, with pain and suffering occurring randomly. From our limited human perspective, we may be unable to comprehend the events in the world, but this does not indicate an absence of higher purposes and goals. Some patterns of events are recognizable and have clear causes and effects, while others may not be so evident. The wisdom behind these is often beyond the comprehension of human beings and points to the magnificent and immeasurable nature of Allah's knowledge and wisdom.

The story of Prophet Moses (ﷺ) and al-Khiḍr¹² in Chapter 18 (titled al-Kahf) of the Qur'an is a well-known example of Allah's wisdom in the workings of life. In this story, al-Khiḍr informs Moses that Allah has bestowed upon him some knowledge that Moses does not have; likewise, Moses has some knowledge that he (al-Khiḍr) does not have. Moses asks to acquire some of al-Khiḍr's knowledge, so they travel together. During their journey, al-Khiḍr engages in actions that seem unusual or unacceptable to Moses: he damages a ship, kills a young boy, and repairs a wall in a town whose people had refused to entertain them as guests. Moses grows impatient and questions him about these incidents. Al-Khiḍr first reminds him to be patient and later informs him of the rationale behind his actions.

In the case of the ship, there was a king who seized for himself every vessel that was in good working condition. Since the owners of this ship were poor and had nothing else of value, Al-Khiḍr wanted to make it appear defective so that it would not be taken from them.

¹² There is a difference of opinion over whether al-Khiḍr was a prophet or a righteous servant of Allah, but the majority of scholars are of the opinion that he was a prophet. This is because knowledge of the true realities behind events can only be known through revelation, and an individual only learns from someone who is above him or her, or at least on the same level. (In other words, someone who is not a prophet cannot be above a prophet.) Ibn Taymiyah, *The Friends of Allah*, 64ff.

With regard to the killing of the young boy, he was destined to be a disbeliever; hence, Allah took him from his parents in order to protect them from also falling into disbelief as a result of their strong love for him. Allah later replaced him with another child, who was righteous.

As for the wall, al-Khiḍr repaired it because it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and underneath it was buried some wealth belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man, so al-Khiḍr wanted to ensure that the orphans were taken care of and their wealth was protected.¹³

In a lengthy hadith regarding this story, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Then a bird came and sat on the edge of the boat, dipping its beak once or twice in the sea. Al-Khiḍr said to Moses: My knowledge and your knowledge, in comparison to Allah's knowledge, is like what this bird has taken out of the sea.» (Bukhari)

This is an insightful analogy for a very profound reality; Allah's knowledge is vaster than any amount of knowledge we can ever hope to attain in the short span of our lifetime. We are capable only of processing the external features of events; we lack insight into the underlying wisdom. Allah mentions:

﴿...وَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَعَسَى أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾
(سورة البقرة: ٢١٦)

«...But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. Allah knows, while you know not.»
(Qur'an 2: 216)

This particular verse was revealed in relation to jihad, which is a very difficult undertaking, even for the believers. It begins:

﴿كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ وَهُوَ كَرْهٌ لَكُمْ...﴾
(سورة البقرة: ٢١٦)

¹³ (Qur'an 18: 60-82); Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 6:182-203.

«Fighting has been enjoined upon you while it is hateful to you...»
(*Qur'an* 2: 216)

Events that seem negative and harmful may turn out to be for the best, while events that appear positive, desirable and beneficial on the surface may ultimately turn out to be harmful. The tremendous benefits and rewards for jihad, for example, far outweigh the struggle in which the combatant must engage. Likewise, the sickness from which a person suffers may entail suffering and affliction in this world but goodness in relation to the hereafter (due to the expiation of sins, purification of the soul, elevation of rank, and the like).

This understanding is related to the Islamic belief in qadr. Everything that occurs in the universe happens according to the will and the power of Allah. Whatever Allah wills shall transpire, and what He does not will shall never occur. Nothing happens except what He wills.¹⁴ Trials and tribulations are predestined and are part of Allah's plan. As such, there is certain wisdom in each and every event.

As part of Allah's wisdom, He tests individuals with trials and tribulations that are tailored to match their specific needs, weaknesses, circumstances, and abilities. This is to provide as much benefit as possible to the persons and to facilitate the spiritual and personal growth that they require. Although human beings may not always be aware of them, the meanings and values are inherent in these trials; often they are recognized later during insightful moments of retrospection.

Allah is *al-'Adl* (the Just). In accordance with His justice and mercy, He could never try humans with tribulations that are beyond their capacity to bear — and then punish them for failing. He reassures us:

¹⁴ Yasin, *Book of Emaan*, 157-158.

﴿لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا...﴾ (سورة البقرة: ٢٨٦)

«Allah does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity...»
(*Qur'an* 2: 286)

﴿وَلَا نُكَلِّفُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا وَلَدَيْنَا كِتَابٌ يَنْطِقُ بِالْحَقِّ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ﴾ (سورة المؤمنون: ٦٢)

«And We charge no soul except [with that within] its capacity, and with Us is a record which speaks with truth; they will not be wronged.»
(*Qur'an* 23: 62)

﴿وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَا نُكَلِّفُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ﴾ (سورة الأعراف: ٤٢)

«But those who believed and did righteous deeds — We charge no soul except [within] its capacity. Those are the companions of paradise; they will abide therein eternally.»
(*Qur'an* 7: 42)

These verses indicate that each and every tribulation that individuals face in their lifetimes is within their ability to cope with and manage. No matter how difficult a trial is, it will never exceed the individual's capacity to endure and overcome it. This is a promise from Allah, Who never fails in His promises.

Trials are also followed by periods of ease and rest. Allah knows that humans are incapable of enduring unremitting tribulations, so He intersperses them with periods of respite. A life of continual trials would be not only intolerable but also unjust, and Allah would never be unjust to His creation, nor would He lack mercy.

﴿...وَلَا يَظْلِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا﴾ (سورة الكهف: ٤٩)

«...And your Lord does injustice to no one.» (*Qur'an* 18: 49)

﴿...وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِظَلَمٍ لِلْعَبِيدِ﴾ (سورة فصلت: ٤٦)

«...And your Lord is not ever unjust to [His] servants.»

(*Qur'an* 41: 46)

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ النَّاسَ شَيْئًا وَلَكِنَّ النَّاسَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ﴾ (١١)

(سورة يونس: ٤٤)

«Indeed, Allah does not wrong the people at all, but it is the people who are wronging themselves.» (Qur'an 10: 44)

Another example of Allah's wisdom and justice in the universe is in relation to provisions. Allah informs us that He sends provisions based upon His wisdom. Due to His mercy, He sometimes limits His bounties for certain people because He knows what they would do with expanded provisions; in this way, He reduces their corruption and tyranny on the earth. In their rebellion, they would have become arrogant and forgetful of their duty to Allah. The restriction of provisions humbles the human beings as they become more conscious of their constant state of dire need for Allah's mercy and grace.

﴿وَلَوْ بَسَطَ اللَّهُ الرِّزْقَ لِعِبَادِهِ لَبَغَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَكِنْ يُنَزِّلُ بِقَدَرٍ مَا يَشَاءُ إِنَّهُمْ بِعِبَادِهِ

خَيْرٌ بَصِيرٌ﴾ (سورة الشورى: ٢٧)

«And if Allah had extended [excessively] provision for His servants, they would have committed tyranny throughout the earth. But He sends [it] down in an amount which He wills. Indeed, He is, of His servants, Acquainted and Seeing.» (Qur'an 42: 27)

Believers will be tested

It cannot be assumed that only evil people are tried and tested, or that a good and righteous person will be immune to the ups and downs of life. Allah informs us that even the believers will be tested in this life; in fact, it is the believers who will be tested to the greatest extent.

﴿أَحْسِبَ النَّاسَ أَنْ يَتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ﴾ (٢) ﴿وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ

بَيْنِهِمْ فَلْيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلْيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكَاذِبِينَ﴾ (سورة العنكبوت: ٢-٣)

«Do the people think that they will be left to say: We believe — and they will not be tried? But We have certainly tried those before them, and Allah will surely make evident those who are truthful, and He will surely make evident the liars.» (Qur'an 29: 2-3)

Do you think that you will be left alone to say, "I believe", and you will not be tested? Were not those before you tested, and were they not tested more severely? The purpose of these tests for the believers is to determine the depth of faith in their hearts and their level of commitment to Allah and His religion. There are some who claim to be believers, but when the time comes to sacrifice for the sake of Allah or to give up worldly desires, the weakness of their faith becomes evident.

The reality of our existence is not only that humans will be tested but that they will be tested in ways commensurate with their level of faith, with the prophets (peace be upon them all) having suffered the greatest tests, followed by the next best and then the next best. In essence, those who are more religious will experience more severe and intense tribulations.

«Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqâs (رضي الله عنه) reported: I said: O Messenger of Allah, who are the most afflicted of all people?

He replied: The prophets, then the righteous people, then those who are nearest to them in perfection and those who are nearest to them. Man is tested according to his piety; if he is strong in religion, his test is increased, and if he is weak in religion, his test is reduced. A believer will be tested until he walks on the earth sinless (his sins having been erased by the series of afflictions that he has endured).» (Bukhari and at-Tirmidhi)

As mentioned in this hadith and discussed in a later section, there are blessings in these tests, for the believers continue to be tried until all their sins have been wiped away and their soul has been purified. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

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«Trials will continue to befall the believing men and the believing women in (terms of) themselves, their children, and their wealth, until they meet Allah without having any sins.» (A reliable hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

As such, calamities, tests, and trials are signs of Allah's love for the believers. When one fully comprehends the benefits of these trials, the true extent of Allah's love becomes apparent. It should suffice to know that affliction by tests and trials in this life is less severe than the punishment in the hereafter and that in those experiences, there may be expiation of sins, elevation of rank, and purification of the soul. Tribulations are a mercy from Allah, because if people had to carry forward their sins into the hereafter, the pain and suffering would be intense and unbearable.

Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said:

«If Allah wants to do good for someone, He afflicts him with trials.» (Bukhari)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) also said:

«Indeed, the extent of the reward will be in accordance with the extent of the trial (suffering), and indeed, when Allah loves a people, He tries them (with afflictions). So whoever is content (or pleased with Allah's decree), then for him is (Allah's) pleasure, and whoever is angry (or displeased), then for him is (Allah's) anger.» (A reliable hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi and Ibn Mâjah)

For the true believers (in Islamic monotheism), testing is an important criterion for being admitted into paradise and for attaining a high level there. Gaining entry into paradise is not easy; it comes about only with steadfast faith based upon *tawhîd* (the Islamic belief in the Oneness of Allah), sincere obedience to Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ), and complete trust in Allah. True believers must strive and struggle in order to reach this final goal and to obtain the rewards that await them.

﴿أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِكُمْ مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ...﴾ (٢١٤)

(سورة البقرة: ٢١٤)

«Or do you think that you will enter paradise while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you?...»

(Qur'an 2: 214)

﴿أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَعْلَمِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا مِنْكُمْ وَيَعْلَمَ

(سورة آل عمران: ١٤٢)

الضَّابِرِينَ﴾ (١٤٢)

«Or do you think that you will enter paradise while Allah has not yet made evident those of you who fight in His cause and made evident those who are steadfast?»

(Qur'an 3: 142)

Ultimately, it is only due to the mercy and grace of Allah that one is saved from the hellfire and permitted entrance into paradise. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Work and strive hard, and know that no one will enter paradise by virtue of his deeds.

They (the Companions) asked: Not even you, O Messenger of Allah?

He responded: Not even me, unless Allah showers me with His mercy and grace.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

«No one's deeds [alone] will save him (from the hellfire).

They (the people) asked: Even you (will not be saved by your deeds), O Messenger of Allah?

He replied: No, even I (will not be saved) unless and until Allah protects me with His grace and His mercy...» (Bukhari)

Righteous deeds are important because they are a means of earning Allah's mercy and forgiveness. Allah mentions:

﴿وَتِلْكَ الْجَنَّةُ الَّتِي أُورِثْتُمُوهَا بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ﴾ (سورة الزُّحْرُف: ٧٢)

«And that is paradise, which you are made to inherit for what you used to do.»

(Qur'an 43: 72)

Regarding this verse, Ibn Katheer states:

...the righteous deeds which were the cause of your being included in the mercy of Allah. For no one will be admitted to Paradise by virtue of their deeds alone; that will be by the mercy and grace of Allah. But the varying ranks and degrees of Paradise will be attained according to one's righteous deeds.¹⁵

Allah mentions:

﴿وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ﴾

(سورة المائدة: ٩)

«Allah has promised those who believe and do righteous deeds [that] for them there is forgiveness and great reward.» (Qur'an 5: 9)

Ibn Katheer explains:

...which is Paradise, that is part of Allah's mercy for His servants. They will not earn Paradise on account of their good actions, but rather on account of His mercy and favor, even though they will qualify to earn this mercy on account of their good actions. Allah has made these actions the cause and path that lead to His mercy, favor, pardon and acceptance. Therefore, all this is from Allah Alone and all thanks are due to Him.¹⁶

Allah tests with good and with evil

The term 'tribulation' often conjures up images of pain, suffering, and destruction, but in actuality, Allah tests humans with both good and evil. The existence of opposites is part of His wisdom and balance in the universe, as well as a demonstration of His ability to decree and create anything that He wishes. He mentions:

¹⁵ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 8:659.

¹⁶ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 3:123.

﴿وَقَطَعْنَاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أُمَمًا مِمَّا مَنَّاهُمُ الصَّالِحَاتِ وَمِنْهُمْ دُونَ ذَلِكَ وَبَلَوْنَاهُمْ بِالْحَسَنَاتِ وَالسَّيِّئَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ﴾

(سورة الأعراف: ١٦٨)

«And We divided them throughout the earth into nations. Some of them were righteous, and some of them were otherwise. We tested them with good [times] and bad that perhaps they would return [to obedience].» (Qur'an 7: 168)

﴿كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَبَلَوْنَاهُمْ بِالْأَشْرِّ وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ﴾

(سورة الأنبياء: ٣٥)

«Every soul will taste death. We test you with evil and with good as trial; and to Us you will be returned.» (Qur'an 21: 35)

Everything on the earth, in fact, is part of the divine test that Allah has put forth for humans. Hardship and ease, wealth and poverty, good and bad... all are intended to be tests. During times of both ease and blessing, we are expected to be grateful; during times of difficulty and hardship, we should be patient. Ironically, times of ease may present more of a challenge than times of hardship. During times of distress, we naturally call upon Allah (as the Qur'an notes in several places), but throughout periods of ease, we may immerse ourselves in pleasure and gratification, thus becoming heedless of Allah and of the realization that all bounty ultimately comes from Him.

An important point should be noted regarding the decreeing of evil. Divine will and predestination are positive, and evil does not belong to Allah. Evil cannot be attributed to Allah, nor can it be considered one of His actions. His knowledge, recording, will and creation of events all contain complete wisdom, justice, and mercy.¹⁷ The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«I respond to your call (O Allah!), and I am obedient to your orders. All good is in Your Hands, and evil is not attributable to You...» (Muslim)

¹⁷ Yasin, *Book of Emaan*, 157-158.

Although evil is present in the creation (because Allah created everything), Allah does not create pure evil without any benefit or wisdom. He does not intend for anything to be evil in every respect; as such, evil is only relative. It may seem evil from the perspective of humans, but it is good with regard to Allah and His will and creation.¹⁸ Consequently, we have no right to be angry with what Allah has decreed for us. Instead, we must be patient and secure in the knowledge that every event in our lives has goodness and a potential benefit. Allah is not questioned about what He does with His creation, but those whom He created will be questioned. (This topic will be discussed further in the section on coping.)

Distinguishing between what Allah wills and what He loves

There is a difference between what Allah wills for His servants and what He Himself loves; one does not necessarily imply the other. In this case, we are referring to His universal will, meaning His intent to create all that He has created.¹⁹ All creation is subject to His intent and universal will.²⁰ Allah may will something that He does not love, and He might love something but not will it to happen.²¹

For instance, Allah created Satan and willed that he and his forces would exist, but this does not mean that He loves Satan, his soldiers, or their evil activities. Disbelief occurs by His will, but He does not love it; on the contrary, He detests and abhors it. Allah mentions:

¹⁸ Yasin, *Book of Emaan*, 159-160.

¹⁹ The other type of will is the religious will, which includes what Allah has legislated, ordered, and rewarded; He loves and is pleased with everything that He has legislated for His servants. See Ibn Taymiyah, *The Friends of Allah*, 285-286.

²⁰ Ibn Taymiyah, *The Friends of Allah*, 286.

²¹ al-Fawzaan, *Sharh al-'Aqeedah al-Wasitiyyah*, 131.

﴿ قُلْ أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ ۚ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ٣٢)

(سورة آل عمران: ٣٢)

﴿Say: Obey Allah and the Messenger. But if they turn away — then indeed, Allah does not like the disbelievers.﴾ (Qur'an 3: 32)

﴿ إِنْ تَكْفُرُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنْكُمْ وَلَا يَرْضَىٰ لِعِبَادِهِ الْكُفْرَ ... ﴾ (سورة الزمر: ٧)

﴿If you disbelieve — indeed, Allah is free from need of you, and He does not approve for His servants disbelief...﴾ (Qur'an 39: 7)

Likewise, Allah wills sin and disobedience, yet they are displeasing to Him:

﴿ ... فَإِنْ تَرْضَوْا عَنْهُمْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَرْضَىٰ عَنِ الْقَوْمِ الْفَاسِقِينَ ﴾ (سورة التوبة: ٩٦)

(سورة التوبة: ٩٦)

﴿...But if you should be satisfied with them — indeed, Allah is not satisfied with a defiantly disobedient people.﴾ (Qur'an 9: 96)

﴿ وَإِذَا تَوَلَّىٰ سَعَىٰ فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ الْحَرْثَ وَالنَّسْلَ ۚ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفُسَادَ ﴾ (سورة البقرة: ٢٠٥)

﴿And when he goes away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein and to destroy crops and animals. Allah does not like corruption.﴾ (Qur'an 2: 205)

These and other verses indicate that Allah is not pleased with those who are sinful, immoral, or disobedient. He would love for the disbelievers to believe, to enter Islam, and to obey Him, but He does not will that. If He were to will it, it would occur.²²

Allah also allows disbelief and disobedience because of the tremendous benefits they bring about. The concept of faith would be unknown if not for the existence of disbelief. If there were no disbelief, it would be impossible for the believer to recognize the extent of Allah's favours and blessings upon him (that is, faith itself). The

²² al-Fawzaan, *Sharh al-'Aqeedah al-Wasitiyyah*, 131.

existence of Satan, disbelief and disobedience also makes it possible to command good and forbid evil, to engage in jihad for the sake of Allah, to love and hate for the sake of Allah, to repent, to display patience, to rely upon Allah, and so on.²³

Likewise, Allah wills trials and tribulations for His servants, but this does not imply that He is pleased with the pain and suffering that they must endure. Doctors do not enjoy giving bitter medicine, painful treatment, or surgery, but based on their knowledge, they understand the benefits for the long-term health of the patients. Similarly, the suffering from trials and tribulations may be objectionable to both the giver and the recipient, but it is desirable due to the objectives and outcomes that may be achieved in terms of goodness, purification, and elevation. Thus, Allah may hate something in and of itself, but this does not contradict or conflict with His decreeing it for some ultimate and more beloved purpose.

Tribulations will increase

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) related that there would come a time when the frequency and severity of trials and tribulations would increase to such an extent that a person would pass by a graveyard and wish that he or she were in it. In fact, this reality is narrated in a number of hadiths:

«Usâmah ibn Zayd (رضي الله عنه) narrated: Once the Prophet (ﷺ) stood on one of the hills of Madinah and said: Do you see what I see? (No doubt) I see the places (or spots) of afflictions among your houses; these afflictions will be like the spots where rain falls.» (Bukhari and Muslim)²⁴

²³ al-'Uthaimin, *Commentary on Shaikh al-Islâm Ibn Taymiyah's al-'Aqidah al-Wâsitiyyah*, 2:312-313.

²⁴ In Bukhari, the wording is:

«I see fitan falling among your houses as raindrops fall.»

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«The Hour will not be established until a man passes by someone's grave and rolls around on the dust of that grave, saying: Would that I were in his place — not because of debt but from the afflictions that will prevail.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

«There will be afflictions, then afflictions, and then afflictions. (When they prevail,) the one who sits will be better than the one who walks, and the one who walks will be better than the one who rushes to them...» (Muslim)

«There will be fitan (in the near future) during which the person sitting will be better than the one standing, and the one standing will be better than the one walking, and the one walking will be better than the one running. Whoever exposes himself to these fitan will be destroyed by them, so whoever can find a place of protection or refuge from them should take shelter in it.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

«There will come a time when the Muslim's best property is sheep, which he will take to the mountaintops and the places of rainfall so as to flee with his religion from fitan.» (Bukhari)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) even predicted the widespread killing that we see today before our very eyes.

«The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: Time will pass rapidly, good deeds will decrease, miserliness will be thrown (in the hearts of the people), fitan will appear, and there will be much *ḥaraj*.

They asked: O Allah's Messenger! What is *ḥaraj*?

He replied: Killing! Killing!» (Bukhari)

«The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: The Hour shall not be established unless much *ḥaraj* occurs.

It was asked: What is *ḥaraj*, O Messenger of Allah?

He answered: Killing, killing.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

Each time will be worse than the one preceding it.

«Narrated az-Zubayr ibn 'Adiyy: We went to Anas ibn Mâlik and complained about the wrongs we were suffering at the hands of al-Ḥajjâj. Anas ibn Mâlik said: Be patient until you meet your Lord (Allah), for every time that comes upon you will be worse than the time that it follows. I heard this from your Prophet (ﷺ).» (Bukhari)

The reality of these sayings of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is evident in our current times, when the number and severity of trials and tribulations appear to be on the rise. The Prophet (ﷺ) pointed to the basis for this when he said:

«...good deeds will decrease...» (Bukhari)

This not only causes an increase in tribulations, but it is also a trial in itself, as we will discuss in more detail in another section.

Trials and tribulations will continue to increase in severity until the end of time, encompassing both the minor and the major signs of the Day of Judgement. Some of these signs include wars and killing; the corruption of Muslims; the spread of ignorance; the emergence of Gog and Magog;²⁵ the destruction of the *Kaaba* (the House of Allah in Makkah); the emergence of the beast; the fire; and the greatest tribulation for humankind, the *Dajjâl* (the Antichrist); as well as many others.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Between the creation of Adam and the arrival of the Hour, there is no fitnah greater than (that of) the *Dajjâl*.» (Muslim)

It is beyond the scope of this book to cover all of these in detail, but some will be mentioned in subsequent sections.²⁶

²⁵ See (*Qur'an* 18: 83-98).

²⁶ For more information on this topic, the reader is advised to consult detailed resources such as Ibn Kathir, *Book of the End: Great Trials and Tribulations* and al-Ashqar, *The Minor Resurrection (What Happens after Death) in the Light of the Qur'an and Sunnah*.

The retreat of Islam and the removal of the Qur'an

Towards the end of time, Islam will become strange and will retreat from the earth. Knowledge will be removed, ignorance will become widespread, and the Qur'an will be raised back up to the heavens. Allah will take away (through death) anyone who has a trace of faith in his or her heart. The trumpet for the Day of Resurrection will be blown when only the worst of humankind remain upon the earth.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Islam began as something strange and will revert to being something strange, so glad tidings to the strangers.» (Muslim)

«Islam began as something strange and will revert to being something strange as it began, and it will retreat between the two mosques as a snake retreats to its hole.» (Muslim)

«Faith will retreat to Madinah just as a snake retreats to its hole.» (Muslim)

«The Hour will not begin as long as anyone says: There is none worthy of worship other than Allah.» (Muslim, Aḥmad, al-Ḥâkim and Ibn Ḥibbân)

In another version:

«The Hour will not begin as long as it is said on the earth: Allah, Allah.» (Muslim)

«Near the establishment of the Hour, there will be days during which (religious) knowledge will be taken away (by the death of religious scholars) and general ignorance will spread, and there will be ḥaraj in abundance, and ḥaraj means killing.» (Bukhari)

«Allah does not take away the knowledge by taking it away from (the hearts of) the people; He takes it away by the death of the religious learned men until none of the religious learned men remain. People

will take as their leaders ignorant persons who, when consulted, will give their verdicts without knowledge. So they will go astray and will lead the people astray.» (Bukhari)

«Islam will wear out as the embroidery on a garment wears out, until no one knows what fasting, prayer, (pilgrimage) rites and charity are. The Book of Allah will be taken away at night, and not one verse of it will be left on the earth. There will be some people left — old men and old women — who will say: We heard our fathers saying these words: There is none worthy of worship other than Allah. So we say them, too.» (A sound hadith recorded by Ibn Mâjah)

Ibn Mas'ood (رضي الله عنه) stated, "Indeed this Qur'an that is with you will soon be removed from you!"

They said, "How will it be removed from us when Allah has made it firmly established in our hearts, and we have preserved it in our *muṣ-ḥafs* (copies of the Qur'an)?"

He said, "It will be raised in a single night, so that which is in the hearts will be raised, and that which is in the *muṣ-ḥaf* will vanish, and the people will awaken in dire need of it."

Then he recited the statement of Allah:

«And if we willed, we could surely take away that which we have revealed to you...» (Qur'an 17: 86) (A sound hadith recorded by Ibn Abi Shaybah, at-Ṭabarâni, and Abdur-Razzâq)²⁷

The Qur'an will be raised up due to the people's abandoning it and neglecting its message and teachings. They will no longer deserve this miraculous blessing, which was bestowed upon the people by their Creator.²⁸ May Allah protect us from being among those who abandon and neglect His revelation, and may He assist us in sincerely appreciating the remarkable nature of this bounty.

²⁷ al-Imam, *The Disappearance of Knowledge*, 322.

²⁸ al-Imam, *The Disappearance of Knowledge*, 332-333.

TYPES OF TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

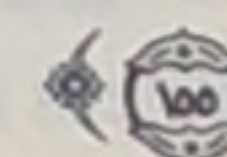
As mentioned earlier, there are various types of trials and tribulations that may be experienced during our worldly existence. For each individual, Allah has willed a unique set of tests according to his or her nature, capacity and level of faith. He also designs trials to target particular weaknesses that need correction or purification. Allah never tests a person beyond what he or she is able to bear or cope with; nor does He allow a person to bear the burdens of others.

Physical trials

Within this category, we find the examples mentioned in the introduction, including natural disasters, wars, deaths of loved ones, loss of employment and wealth, loss of fruit and crops, physical illness, and hunger. Allah may test us within ourselves or through our family members and loved ones. Obviously, these types of trials include psychological and emotional aspects, but the primary component is physical in nature, as Allah mentions:

﴿وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ ...﴾

(سورة البقرة: ١٥٥)



«And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits...» (Qur'an 2: 155)

These tests will not be strictly limited to the physical realm; they will encompass other aspects as well. Poverty, for example, affects an individual physically, but it also restricts social interaction, limits opportunities, and may lead to feelings of frustration, worry, and

humiliation. Also, a needy person may be tempted to engage in immoral behaviours or to beg in order to obtain provisions.

﴿الشَّيْطَانُ يَعِدُكُمُ الْفَقْرَ وَيَأْمُرُكُم بِالْفَحْشَاءِ وَاللَّهُ يَعِدُكُم مَّغْفِرَةً مِّنْهُ وَفَضْلًا...﴾ (سورة البقرة: ٢٦٨)

«Satan threatens you with poverty and orders you to immorality, while Allah promises you forgiveness from Him and bounty...»

(Qur'an 2: 268)

On the other side of the continuum, wealth itself may be a test, as Allah reminds us:

﴿...نَحْنُ قَسَمْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ مَّعِيشَتَهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَرَفَعْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ لِّيَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُهُم بَعْضًا سُلْحَارًا...﴾ (سورة الزخرف: ٣٢)

«...It is We who have apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of this world and have raised some of them above others in degrees [of rank] that they may make use of one another for service...»

(Qur'an 43: 32)

﴿وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْخَلْقَ الْأَرْضِ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ لِّيَبْلُوكُمْ فِي مَاءِ اتَّكُم...﴾ (سورة الأنعام: ١٦٥)

«And it is He who has made you successors upon the earth and has raised some of you above others in degrees [of rank] that He may try you through what He has given you...»

(Qur'an 6: 165)

Ibn Katheer notes that the phrase «...has raised some of you above others in degrees [of rank]...» may refer to the differences in provision that He bestows upon humans, with some being granted more than others. Inevitably, whatever a person receives is a test from Allah. The poor are expected to be patient, whereas the wealthy are expected to be grateful.²⁹ Both groups will be asked about their responses to their respective positions in life.

²⁹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 3:546.

Concerning wealth, it has been narrated by Hakeem ibn Hizâm: «I asked the Prophet (ﷺ) (for money) and he gave me some, and then again I asked him and he gave me some, and then again I asked him and he gave me some.

He then said: This wealth is (like) green and sweet (fruit). Whoever takes it without greed, Allah will bless it for him, but whoever takes it with greed, Allah will not bless it for him; he will be like the one who eats but is never satisfied. The upper (giving) hand is better than the lower (taking) hand.» (Bukhari)

Social and community trials

Undoubtedly, people will experience difficulty from those who are nearest and dearest to them, such as family members, as well as others in their social, educational or employment networks. During our lives, we will come in contact with some people who share our beliefs and values and others who do not. Some of the people will assist us in increasing our faith and obedience to Allah, while others may present us with major trials and temptations that can mislead us from the straight path. Allah mentions:

﴿...وَجَعَلْنَا بَعْضَكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ فِتْنَةً أَتَصْبِرُونَ وَكَانَ رَبُّكَ بَصِيرًا﴾ (سورة الفرقان: ٢٠)

(سورة الفرقان: ٢٠)

«...And We have made some of you [people] as trials for others — will you have patience? And ever is your Lord, Seeing.»

(Qur'an 25: 20)

Allah tells us that most of those upon the earth will attempt to mislead the believers from the straight path.

﴿وَلَا تَطِعْ أَكْثَرَ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يُضِلُّوكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَخْرُصُونَ﴾ (سورة الأنعام: ١١٦)

(سورة الأنعام: ١١٦)

«And if you obey most of those upon the earth, they will mislead you from the way of Allah. They follow not except assumption, and they are not but falsifying.» (Qur'an 6: 116)

﴿...وَإِنْ كَثِيرٌ لَّيُضِلُّونَ بِأَهْوَاءِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُعْتَدِينَ﴾ (سورة الأنعام: ١١٩)

(سورة الأنعام: ١١٩)

«...And indeed do many lead [others] astray through their [own] inclinations without knowledge. Indeed, your Lord — He is most knowing of the transgressors.» (Qur'an 6: 119)

There will even come a time when practicing Islam and following the straight path will appear to be something strange. This does not mean that it will be strange in and of itself, or in terms of its beliefs and practices; rather, it will seem strange because only a minority of people are adhering to it. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) warned us that during these times of strangeness, believers will be tested to a greater extent; he said:

«Islam began as something strange, and it shall return to being something strange, so give glad tidings to the strangers.» (Muslim, at-Tirmidhi and Ibn Mâjah)

The strangers are characterized by their remaining firm on tawhîd, even if people attempt to corrupt it with polytheism. They are sincere and dedicated in their worship of Allah alone without any partners. They hold onto the Sunnah of the Messenger (ﷺ), even as other people abandon it. They reject innovations in religion, even if such practices are common.

It is due to their steadfastness and the firmness of their faith that the disbelievers, the hypocrites, the misguided and the ignorant among the Muslims will attempt to divert them from the straight path upon which they are travelling. The tests will come in a variety of forms, as discussed in detail below. Regardless of what they attempt to do, though, Allah promises to protect the believers from the plots and the plans of the enemies of Islam:

﴿ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاكَ عَلَىٰ شَرِيعَةٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْرِ فَاتَّبِعْهَا وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨﴾ إِنَّهُمْ لَن يَغْنُوا عَنْكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَإِنَّ الظَّالِمِينَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ وَاللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٩﴾﴾ (سورة الجاثية: ١٨-١٩)

«Then We put you [O Muhammad] on an ordained way concerning the matter [of religion]; so follow it and do not follow the inclinations of those who do not know. Indeed, they will never avail you against Allah at all. Indeed, the wrongdoers are allies of one another, but Allah is the protector of the righteous.» (Qur'an 45: 18-19)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«A group of my Ummah will continue to prevail, adhering to the truth; they will not be harmed by those who forsake them, until the command of Allah comes to pass when they are like that.» (Muslim)

1. Testing by disbelievers

The disbelievers are a major and ongoing source of trial and tribulation for the believers. They will attempt to divert them from the path of Allah with all the tools and techniques at their disposal, including arguments, plots and plans, and physical warfare. Through arguments and debates, they attempt to instil doubts in the minds of the believers and shake their faith. Their plotting and planning involves both direct attacks on the religion and more insidious methods involving tools of media, economics, politics, and education. The goals and effects of physical warfare are the obvious devastation and weakening of the Ummah and the resultant discord. At the same time, the disbelievers seek to harness multiple benefits including wealth, oil, and military and political control. Allah mentions:

﴿وَدَّ كَثِيرٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَوْ يَرُدُّونَكُم مِّنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِكُمْ كُفَّارًا حَسَدًا مِّنْ عِنْدِ أَنْفُسِهِمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ مَا بَيَّنَّ لَهُمُ الْحَقُّ...﴾ (سورة البقرة: ١٠٩)

«Many of the People of the Scripture wish they could turn you back to disbelief after you have believed, out of envy from themselves [even] after the truth has become clear to them...» (Qur'an 2: 109)

﴿قُلْ يَتَّاهِلُ الْكِتَابُ لِمَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ شَهِيدٌ عَلَىٰ مَا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾ (١١٠) ﴿قُلْ يَتَّاهِلُ الْكِتَابُ لِمَ تَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ مَن ءَامَنَ تَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا وَأَنْتُمْ شُهَدَاءُ ۚ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾ (١١١) ﴿يَتَّاهِلُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِن تَطِيعُوا فِرْقًا مِّنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ يَرُدُّوكُم بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ كَافِرِينَ﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ٩٨-١٠٠)

«Say: O People of the Scripture, why do you disbelieve in the verses of Allah while Allah is Witness over what you do? Say: O People of the Scripture, why do you avert from the way of Allah those who believe, seeking to make it [seem] deviant, while you are witnesses [to the truth]? Allah is not unaware of what you do. O you who have believed, if you obey a party of those who were given the Scripture, they will turn you back, after your belief, [to being] unbelievers.»

(Qur'an 3: 98-100)

﴿يَتَّاهِلُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِن تَطِيعُوا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يَرُدُّوكُم عَلَىٰ أَعْقَابِكُمْ فَتَنْقَلِبُوا خَاسِرِينَ﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١٤٩)

«O you who have believed, if you obey those who disbelieve, they will turn you back on your heels, and you will [then] become losers.»

(Qur'an 3: 149)

Among the disbelievers will be those who ridicule or mock the believers and openly demonstrate prejudice, discrimination, and hostility.

﴿زُيِّنَ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَيَسْخَرُونَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ...﴾ (سورة البقرة: ٢١٢)

«Beautified for those who disbelieve is the life of this world, and they ridicule those who believe. But those who fear Allah are above them on the Day of Resurrection...» (Qur'an 2: 212)

﴿...وَلَتَسْمَعُنَّ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ وَمِنَ الَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا أَذًى كَثِيرًا وَإِنْ تَصْبِرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُمُورِ﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١٨٦)

(سورة آل عمران: ١٨٦)

«...And you will surely hear much abuse from those who were given the Scripture before you and from those who associate others with Allah. But if you are patient and fear Allah — indeed, that is of the matters [worthy] of determination.» (Qur'an 3: 186)

Allah indicates that if He had willed it, He could have united all the nations under one religion. Instead, He allowed diverse religious beliefs and practices in order to test human beings. On the Day of Judgement, He will inform them about the correct religion (Islam) and about that over which they used to differ and debate. He mentions:

﴿وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيْمِنًا عَلَيْهِ ۖ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَهُم بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ عَمَّا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ ۚ لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَٰكِن لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا ءَاتَاكُمْ ۖ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ ۚ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ﴾ (سورة المائدة: ٤٨)

«And We have revealed to you [O Muhammad] the Book [the Qur'an] in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the scripture and as a criterion over it. So judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their inclinations away from what has come to you of the truth. To each of you We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then]

inform you concerning that over which you used to differ.﴾

(Qur'an 5: 48)

2. Testing by hypocrites

The hypocrites are people who claim to be Muslims, but in reality, they are the greatest enemies of Islam and the Muslims. They oppose the believers through very insidious methods, attempting to confuse, mislead, and harm them in any way possible. Their plotting and planning is very dangerous for the Muslims because of its surreptitious nature. Allah describes the characteristics of the hypocrites:

﴿وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ ءَامِنُوا كَمَا ءَامَنَ النَّاسُ قَالُوا أَنُؤْمِنُ كَمَا ءَامَنَ السُّفَهَاءُ أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ السُّفَهَاءُ وَلَكِن لَّا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٣﴾ وَإِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قَالُوا ءَامَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا إِلَىٰ شَيَاطِينِهِمْ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا مَعَكُمْ إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿١٤﴾ اللَّهُ يَسْتَهْزِئُ بِهِمْ وَيَمُدُّهُمْ فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ ﴿١٥﴾﴾ (سورة البقرة: ١٥)

﴿And when it is said to them: Believe as the people have believed, they say: Should we believe as the foolish have believed? Unquestionably, it is they who are the foolish, but they know [it] not. When they meet those who believe, they say: We believe — but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say: Indeed, we are with you; we were only mockers. [But] Allah mocks them and prolongs them in their transgression [while] they wander blindly.﴾ (Qur'an 2: 13-15)

﴿إِذَا جَاءَكَ الْمُتَنَفِقُونَ قَالُوا أَنشَهِدْ إِنَّكَ لِرَسُولِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ إِنَّكَ لِرَسُولِهِ وَاللَّهُ شَهِدٌ ﴿١﴾ إِنَّ الْمُتَنَفِقِينَ لَكَذِبُونَ ﴿٢﴾ اتَّخَذُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ جُنَّةً فَصَدُّوا عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنَّهُمْ سَاءَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٣﴾ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ءَامَنُوا ثُمَّ كَفَرُوا فَطُبِعَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ فَهُمْ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ ﴿٤﴾ وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ تُعْجِبُكَ أَجْسَامُهُمْ وَإِنْ يَقُولُوا تَسْمَعُ لِقَوْلِهِمْ كَأَنَّهُمْ خُشُبٌ مُّسْتَدَّةٌ يُحْسِبُونَ كُلَّ صَيِّحَةٍ عَلَيْهِمْ هُمُ الْعَدُوُّ فَاحْذَرْهُمْ قَتَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ أَنَّىٰ يُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٥﴾﴾ (سورة المنافقون: ١-٤)

﴿When the hypocrites come to you [O Muhammad], they say: We testify that you are the Messenger of Allah. Allah knows that you are His Messenger, and Allah testifies that the hypocrites are liars. They have taken their oaths as a cover, so they averted [people] from the way of Allah. Indeed, it was evil what they were doing. That is because they believed, and then they disbelieved; so their hearts were sealed over, and they do not understand. When you see them, their forms please you, and if they speak, you listen to their speech. [They are] as if they were pieces of wood propped up — they think that every shout is against them. They are the enemy, so beware of them. May Allah destroy them; how are they deluded?﴾ (Qur'an 63: 1-4)

The hypocrites attempt to deceive and mislead the believers through their superficial appearance, their speech, and their conduct. They may target weak believers in order to lure them into their traps. They also assist the disbelievers against the believers by providing them with support, assistance and loyalty. For these reasons, their evil is worse than that of the disbelievers who do not pretend.³⁰

Allah warns us against taking hypocrites (or disbelievers) as close friends, allies, helpers or advisors because they engage in plotting and planning to harm the Muslims. They are displeased when goodness befalls the believers, but they rejoice when the believers experience hardship. Allah warns:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا بَطَانَةً مِّن دُونِكُمْ لَا يَأْلُونَكُمْ خَبَالًا وَدُّوا مَا عَنِتُّمْ قَدْ بَدَتِ الْبَغْضَاءُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَمَا تُخْفِي صُدُورُهُمْ أَكْبَرُ قَدْ بَيَّنَّا لَكُمُ الْآيَاتِ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١١٨﴾ هَٰؤُلَاءِ يُحِبُّونَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِبُّونَكُمْ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْكِتَابِ كُلِّهِ وَإِذَا لَقُوكُمْ قَالُوا ءَامَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا عَضُّوا عَلَيْكُمُ الْأَنَامِلَ مِنَ الْغَيْظِ قُلْ مُوتُوا بِغَيْظِكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿١١٩﴾﴾ (سورة الممتحنة: ١١٨-١١٩)

³⁰ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 1:132-133.

بِهَا وَإِنْ تَصْبِرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ كَيْدُهُمْ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ
مُحِيطٌ ﴿١٢٠﴾

(سورة آل عمران: ١١٨-١٢٠)

«O you who have believed, do not take as intimates those other than yourselves [believers], for they will not spare you [any] ruin. They wish you would have hardship. Hatred has already appeared from their mouths, and what their breasts conceal is greater. We have certainly made clear to you the signs, if you will use reason. Here you are loving them, but they do not love you while you believe in the Scripture — all of it. When they meet you, they say: We believe. But when they are alone, they bite their fingertips at you in rage. Say: Die in your rage. Indeed, Allah is Knowing of that within the breasts. If good touches you, it distresses them, but if harm strikes you, they rejoice at it. If you are patient and fear Allah, their plot will not harm you at all. Indeed, Allah is encompassing of what they do.»

(Qur'an 3: 118-120)

The dangers of the hypocrites are serious, for they attempt to pull the believers from the path of salvation into the ultimate form of destruction: following and worshipping *tāghoot* (false gods). Allah mentions:

﴿أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ يَزْعُمُونَ أَنَّهُمْ ءَامَنُوا بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ يُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يَتَحَاكَمُوا إِلَى الطَّاغُوتِ وَقَدْ أُمِرُوا أَنْ يَكْفُرُوا بِهِ وَيُرِيدُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ يُضِلَّهُمْ ضَلَالًا بَعِيدًا﴾ ﴿٦٠﴾ وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَإِلَى الرَّسُولِ رَأَيْتَ الْمُنَافِقِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَنْكَ صُدُودًا ﴿٦١﴾ فَكَيْفَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمْ مُصِيبَةٌ بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ ثُمَّ جَاءُوكَ يَحْلِفُونَ بِاللَّهِ إِنْ أَرَدْنَا إِلَّا إِحْسَانًا وَتَوْفِيقًا ﴿٦٢﴾ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُ اللَّهُ مَا فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْهُمْ وَعِظْهُمْ وَقُلْ لَهُمْ فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ قَوْلًا بَلِيغًا ﴿٦٣﴾

(سورة النساء: ٦٠-٦٣)

«Have you not seen those who claim to have believed in what was revealed to you [O Muhammad] and what was revealed before you? They wish to refer legislation to *tāghoot*, while they were commanded to reject it, and Satan wishes to lead them far astray. When it is said to them: Come to what Allah has revealed and to the Messenger — you see the hypocrites turning away from you in aversion. So how [will it be] when disaster strikes them because of what their hands have put forth, and then they come to you swearing by Allah: We intended nothing but good conduct and accommodation. Those are the ones whom Allah knows what is in their hearts, so turn away from them, but admonish them and speak to them a far-reaching [effective] word.»

(Qur'an 4: 60-63)

3. Divisions and killing within the Ummah

Testing may also occur through misguided and ignorant members of the Ummah who divide into sects and thereby cause confusion and conflict. Allah mentions:

﴿قُلْ هُوَ الْقَادِرُ عَلَى أَنْ يَبْعَثَ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابًا مِنْ فَوْقِكُمْ أَوْ مِنْ تَحْتِ أَرْجُلِكُمْ أَوْ يَلْبِسَكُمْ شِيْعًا وَيُذِيقَ بَعْضَكُمْ بَأْسَ بَعْضٍ أَنْظُرْ كَيْفَ نَصَرَفَ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَفْقَهُونَ﴾ ﴿٦٥﴾

(سورة الأنعام: ٦٥)

«Say: He is the [One] Able to send upon you affliction from above you or from beneath your feet or to confuse you [so you become] sects and make you taste the violence of one another. Look how We diversify the signs that they might understand.»

(Qur'an 6: 65)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«The Jews split into seventy-one or seventy-two sects, and the Christians split into seventy-one or seventy-two sects, and my Ummah

will split into seventy-three sects.» (A reliable hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood and at-Tirmidhi)

«Those who came before you from the People of the Book split into seventy-two sects, and this Ummah will split into seventy-three sects, of which seventy-two will be in the fire and one in paradise. That one is the *jamâ'ah* (main group of Muslims).» (A reliable hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

«I enjoin you to fear Allah and to listen and obey, even if he (the leader appointed over you) is an Ethiopian slave. Whoever among you lives after I am gone will see many differences; you must adhere to my Sunnah and the way of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs. Hold on to it and cling fast to it. Beware of newly-invented matters, for every newly-invented matter is an innovation, and every innovation is a deviation.» (A sound hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

Sects develop when people follow their own inclinations instead of the truth, to such an extent that groups become biased, hateful, and hostile towards one another to the point that they are ready to kill each other. Allah indicates in the previous verse that His signs are diversified so that humans will understand the reality of the path of truth. This path is only one; all others are deviations or falsehoods. The path of truth leads to paradise, and the paths of deviation and falsehood lead to the hellfire, either on a permanent or temporary basis.

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) foretold that killing would become widespread and that Muslims would kill each other. Although this has occurred in various times and places throughout history, it continues to this day in an atrocious and appalling manner.

«The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: By the One in Whose Hand is my soul, this world will not cease to be until there comes a day when the killer will not know why he killed and the slain will not know why he was slain.

It was said: How will that be?

He said: (Because of) widespread killing. The slayer and the slain will both be in the fire.» (Muslim)

The Prophet (ﷺ) taught that both would be in the hellfire.

«The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: When two Muslims confront one another with their swords, the slayer and the slain will both be in the fire.

It was asked: O Messenger of Allah, (we understand about) the slayer, but what about the slain?

He responded: He wanted to kill his companion.» (Muslim)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Allah drew the ends of the earth together for me to see, and I saw its eastern and western lands, and I saw that the dominion of my Ummah will reach as far as what was drawn together for me to see. And I have been given two treasures, the red and the white. I asked my Lord not to let my Ummah be destroyed by a widespread famine and not to let them be dominated by an enemy who was not of them, who would destroy them utterly.

My Lord said: O Muhammad, when I decree something, it cannot be altered. I have granted you that your Ummah will not be destroyed by a widespread famine, and it will not be dominated by an enemy who is not of them, who would destroy them utterly, even if all people from all regions were to come together (to destroy them). However, some of them will destroy others, and some will capture others.» (Muslim)

One of the signs before the Day of Judgement is that the Euphrates River will uncover a mountain of gold and people will fight over it. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said that ninety-nine out of a hundred of them will be killed:

«Soon the Euphrates will uncover a mountain of gold, and when the people hear of it, they will hasten towards it. Those who are near it will say: If we let the people (proceed), they will take it all away. So

they will fight for it, and out of every hundred, ninety-nine will be killed.» (Muslim)

«The Hour will not begin until the Euphrates uncovers a mountain of gold and the people fight for it. Out of every hundred, ninety-nine will be killed, and each man among them will say: Perhaps I will be the one who will be saved.» (Muslim)

This hadith refers not only to the tribulation of wealth but also to that of discord and weakness within the Ummah, which will increase to such an extent that Muslims will not hesitate to kill one another just to obtain that wealth. Their fear that others will take it all before they have gotten some for themselves indicates the extent of their avarice and greed.

It is interesting to note that in the second hadith, the ones who fight for the gold say to themselves, "Perhaps I will be the one who will be saved." This indicates that they are aware that only one in a hundred will survive, possibly signifying awareness of the saying of the Messenger (ﷺ). In any case, they seem to be unaware or heedless of another saying of the Prophet (ﷺ) in which he instructed the believers not to take from the gold:

«Soon the Euphrates will uncover a treasure of gold, but whoever is there should not take any of it.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

4. Family and children

Allah informs us in two different verses:

﴿إِنَّمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَأَوْلَادُكُمْ فِتْنَةٌ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ﴾

(سورة التغابن: ١٥)

«Your wealth and your children are but a trial, and Allah has with Him a great reward.» (Qur'an 64: 15)

Blessings, such as wealth and children, may also be tests from Allah to distinguish between two types of people:

- those who will thank Allah and manage these blessings in the correct manner, and
- those who will allow these blessings to distract them from worship, obedience, and remembrance of Allah.

The veracity of these tests is demonstrated by the ease with which people become absorbed in their possessions, spouses, or children; in order to please them, they may fall short in their duties to Allah or they may engage in forbidden acts. Allah cautions us:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تُلْهِكُمْ أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ

يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ﴾ (سورة المنافقون: ٩)

«O you who have believed, let not your wealth and your children divert you from the remembrance of Allah. Whoever does that — then those are the losers.» (Qur'an 63: 9)

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّ مِنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ وَأَوْلَادِكُمْ عَدُوًّا لَكُمْ

فَاحْذَرُوهُمْ...﴾ (سورة التغابن: ١٤)

«O you who have believed, indeed, among your wives and your children are enemies to you, so beware of them...» (Qur'an 64: 14)

Ibn 'Abbâs said in relation to this verse:

There were men who embraced Islam in Makkah and wanted to migrate to Allah's Messenger. However, their wives and children refused to allow them. Later when they joined Allah's Messenger, they found that those who were with him (the Companions) had gained knowledge in the religion, so they were about to punish their wives and children. Allah the Exalted sent down this verse: But if you pardon (them) and overlook, and forgive, then verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.³¹

³¹ (Qur'an 64: 14); an authentic hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi. Quoted from Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 10:28.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«A man's fitnah because of his family, his wealth, his own self, his child and his neighbour may be expiated by fasting, prayer, charity, and enjoining the good and forbidding the evil.» (Muslim)

In this hadith, the Messenger of Allah mentions that family and children may become trials for an individual and that these may be expiated in various ways. A person may come to have more love for a spouse or another family member than for Allah, and this may be an underlying reason for following him or her in disobedience. A woman may love her husband to such an extent that she obeys him (thus disobeying Allah) when he asks her not to cover herself properly outside the home. Likewise, a man may refrain from going to the mosque for prayer due to his wife's insistence that he stay home and spend time with her. The intense love for children was mentioned earlier in the story of Moses and al-Khiḍr, when al-Khiḍr killed the child who would have been a tribulation for his parents due to his disobedience and their extreme love for him. Allah mentions:

﴿قُلْ إِنْ كَانَ آبَاؤُكُمْ وَأَبْنَاؤُكُمْ وَإِخْوَانُكُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُكُمْ وَعَشِيرَتُكُمْ وَأَمْوَالٌ اقْتَرَفْتُمُوهَا وَبِجَارَةٍ تَخْشَوْنَ كَسَادَهَا وَمَسَاكِنُ تَرْضَوْنَهَا أَحَبَّ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنْ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَجِهَادٍ فِي سَبِيلِهِ فَتَرَبَّصُوا حَتَّى يَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ بِأَمْرِهِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ﴾ (سورة التوبة: ٢٤)

«Say [O Muhammad]: If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your relatives, wealth which you have obtained, commerce wherein you fear declines, and dwellings with which you are pleased are more beloved to you than Allah and His Messenger and jihad [striving] in His cause, then wait until Allah executes His command. Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people.» (Qur'an 9: 24)

In relation to children, another component of the trials is to determine how parents will raise and nurture them. Will we rear them in the shade of Islam, with its many blessings, or will we raise

them with another belief system? Will we teach them the true beauty of being a Muslim, or will we demonstrate only how to carry the name? Will we prepare them for the hereafter, for paradise? Will we be patient as we prepare ourselves for the hereafter?

Psychological and spiritual trials

Allah mentions the testing of humans within their own selves:

﴿لَتَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ فِي أَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَنْفُسِكُمْ...﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١٨٦)
«You will surely be tested in your possessions and in yourselves...» (Qur'an 3: 186)

While this verse refers to the way individuals are tested through wealth, family and children, it also includes the way they are tested within the self, in the form of psychological and spiritual trials.

Trials and tests in this category involve the beliefs, values, and goals of the individuals. They also include various psychological trials that affect not only their thinking but also their emotions and their behaviour, and ultimately their souls. As such, this category strongly involves the spiritual realm.

In the verses mentioned earlier, regarding differences in wealth, note the phrase:

﴿...وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ...﴾ (سورة الأنعام: ١٦٥)
«...and has raised some of you above others in degrees [of rank]...» (Qur'an 6: 165)

This has also been interpreted to mean qualities, characteristics, and conduct.³² These are in the psychological realm and may also include intellect, understanding, and other visible and hidden strengths.³³ Humans are tested by these elements and will be held accountable for what Allah has bestowed upon them. Intelligent individuals, for

³² Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 3:546.

³³ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 8:633.

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اقتَرَفْتُمُوهَا وَتِجَارَةٌ تَخْشَوْنَ كَسَادَهَا وَمَسَاكِنُ تَرْضَوْنَهَا أَحَبَّ إِلَيْكُمْ
مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَجِهَادٍ فِي سَبِيلِهِ فَتَرَبَّصُوا حَتَّى يَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ بِأَمْرِهِ وَاللَّهُ لَا
يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ﴾ (سورة التوبة: ٢٤)

«Say [O Muhammad]: If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your relatives, wealth which you have obtained, commerce wherein you fear declines, and dwellings with which you are pleased are more beloved to you than Allah and His Messenger and jihad [striving] in His cause, then wait until Allah executes His command. Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people.» (Qur'an 9: 24)

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³² Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 3:546.

³³ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 8:633.

example, should use their intelligence for the sake of Allah and for the benefit of their fellow human beings. Of primary importance is that they should avoid becoming arrogant on account of their abilities. Instead, they should express gratitude to Allah and remember that ultimately, whatever they possess and achieve is from Him.

Mental illnesses may also be tests from Allah; they require patience and wisdom. Anxiety and depression are common around the world, affecting literally millions of human beings regardless of age, social class, ethnicity, or culture. According to the World Health Organization website, "Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide, and is a major contributor to the global burden of disease."³⁴ Muslims are not immune from these illnesses; research indicates that they are becoming more common in the Arab world and other parts of the Muslim Ummah.³⁵

Other trials within this category fall into two main types:

Fitnah of doubts

The first of these is the fitnah of doubts, misconceptions, and unclear matters. Individuals may entertain uncertainties, leading to the distortion or destruction of their knowledge and beliefs. These afflictions of doubt are in opposition to the correct 'aqeedah (creed or belief system) of *ahl as-Sunnah wal-jamâ'ah* (the people of the Sunnah and the community). They corrupt one's thinking, understanding and perception. Thus, the afflicted individuals deviate from the true path, either totally or partially, by misunderstanding the divine wisdom behind particular matters. Such people may also introduce innovations in the religion.³⁶

³⁴ World Health Organization, "Depression," World Health Organization, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs369/en/index.html> (accessed April 15, 2013).

³⁵ Nasir and Abdul-Haq, *Depression, Self-harm Behavior and Suicide*, 223.

³⁶ Saleh as-Saleh, "The Contemporary Fitnah: Afflictions, Trials, Tests, Tribulations," Abdurrahman.org, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/TheContemporaryFitnah.pdf> (accessed February 3, 2011).

This is one reason why the acquisition of knowledge is so strongly emphasized in Islam. People with beneficial knowledge know the nature of these trials, and this protects them from falling into such traps. In contrast, ignorant people fall into these traps easily because they lack any knowledge concerning them, their causes, and the means of dealing with them. Allah asks:

﴿أَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ أَفَأَنْتَ تَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ وَكِيلًا ۚ أَمْ تَحْسَبُ أَنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ أَوْ يَعْقِلُونَ إِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا ۚ﴾

(سورة الفرقان: ٤٣-٤٤)

«Have you seen the one who takes as his god his own desire? Then would you be responsible for him? Or do you think that most of them hear or reason? They are not except like livestock. Rather, they are [even] more astray in [their] way.» (Qur'an 25: 43-44)

﴿وَقَالُوا لَوْ كُنَّا نَسْمَعُ أَوْ نَعْقِلُ مَا كُنَّا فِي أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ ۚ﴾

(سورة الملوك: ١٠)

«And they will say: If only we had been listening or reasoning, we would not be among the companions of the blaze.» (Qur'an 67: 10)

One way that humans become misguided is by focusing on verses of the Qur'an that may have more than one meaning or that resemble other verses, while at the same time they ignore verses that have clear and obvious meanings.³⁷ Allah has warned us about this:

³⁷ Ibn al-'Uthaymeen states regarding this matter:

The general ruling for the whole of the Qur'an is that it is *muhkam* (i.e., clear and precise) in its statements, its rulings and its wording and in all other ways. The meaning of it being *mutashaabih* is that its parts resemble each other in perfection, quality and truth and each part corroborates the others, therefore we do not find therein any contradictory judgments nor any irreconcilable statements. On the contrary, each part of it confirms and substantiates the other. However, those verses which may seem to a person to contain some contradiction require study and thought.

Bin Baz, al-'Uthaymin and al-Jibreen, *Fatawa Islamiyah*, 1:152.

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ
فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَبَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ
تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ...﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ٧)

«It is He who has sent down to you [O Muhammad] the Book; in it are verses [that are] precise — they are the foundation of the Book — and others are unspecific. As for those in whose hearts is deviation [from truth], they will follow that of it which is unspecific, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation [suitable to them]. No one knows its [true] interpretation except Allah...» (Qur'an 3: 7)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) once recited this verse and then said: «So when you see those who follow verses or texts of the Qur'an that may have more than one meaning, or that resemble other verses of the Qur'an, then (realize that) these are the ones whom Allah has mentioned, so beware of them.» (A sound hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

The verses that such individuals prefer are those that may have more than one interpretation or whose meaning is known only to Allah (for example, letters such as *alif lām meem* at the beginning of some chapters in the Qur'an). Those who have deviated from the truth like to focus on these verses, seeking or formulating interpretations to fit their own desires and thus attempting to create discord. They fail to interpret or understand them in light of the clear verses, as they should. Not only are they misguided themselves, but they also strive to misguide others by spreading confusion and doubt. These verses become a trial and a test for them and for those whom they attempt to mislead.

Misguidance in relation to knowledge and beliefs may come in various forms, including deviant beliefs from various sects, such as: denying the attributes (or parts of the attributes) of Allah, denying the preordainment of Allah, ascribing the attributes of Allah (infallibility,

knowledge of the unseen, and so on) to humans, making it permissible to shed the blood of Muslims, accusing Muslims of disbelief due to their sins and disobedience, making lawful what is unlawful, worshipping saints or graves, and so forth.³⁸ Such distorted beliefs are often connected to extremism in the religion, either in the form of negligence or exaggeration.

As for exaggeration, the Prophet (ﷺ) explained:

«O people, beware of exaggeration in religion, for those who came before you were only destroyed because of exaggeration in religion.» (A sound hadith recorded by Ibn Mâjah)

Fitnah of lusts and desires

This type of fitnah opposes the will of the individual and leads to corruption in behaviour and choices. It refers to the appetites or desires of the self or soul (involving the stomach, tongue, and private parts), as well as various negative attributes (such as greed, envy, arrogance, laziness, and the desire to commit certain types of sins) and desires (such as those for excess wealth, power, prestige, or authority). While desires involving the stomach and private parts may be considered physical in nature, they also include significant psychological elements. These desires exist within human beings as a test — a test to distinguish between those who will strive to control these desires according to the guidance of Allah and those who will allow them to flourish without being checked. Allah mentions:

﴿وَلَوْ شِئْنَا لَرَفَعْنَاهُ بِهَا وَلَكِنَّهُ أَخْلَدَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ...﴾ (سورة الأعراف: ١٧٦)

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³⁸ Saleh as-Saleh, "The Contemporary Fitnah: Afflictions, Trials, Tests, Tribulations," Abdurrahman.org, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/TheContemporaryFitnah.pdf> (accessed February 3, 2011).

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³⁸ Saleh as-Saleh, "The Contemporary Fitan: Afflictions, Trials, Tests, Tribulations," Abdurrahman.org, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/TheContemporaryFitan.pdf> (accessed February 3, 2011).

«And if We had willed, We could have elevated him thereby, but he adhered [instead] to the earth [to worldly desires] and followed his own desire...» (Qur'an 7: 176)

﴿فَإِنْ لَّمْ يَسْتَجِيبُوا لَكَ فَاعْلَمْ أَنَّمَا يَتَّبِعُونَ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ وَمَنْ أَضَلُّ مِمَّنْ اتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ بِغَيْرِ هُدًى مِنَ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ﴾ (سورة القصص: ٥٠)

«But if they do not respond to you, then know that they only follow their [own] desires. Who is more astray than one who follows his desire without guidance from Allah? Indeed, Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people.» (Qur'an 28: 50)

The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Hell is surrounded by all kinds of desires, whereas paradise is surrounded by all kinds of hardships.» (Bukhari)

The soul itself inclines toward evil, particularly if it is left unrestrained. Prophet Joseph (عليه السلام) mentioned this in response to the temptation by the wife of al-'Azeez:

﴿وَمَا أُبَرِّئُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ﴾ (سورة يوسف: ٥٣)

«And I do not acquit myself. Indeed, the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil, except for those upon which my Lord has mercy. Indeed, my Lord is Forgiving and Merciful.» (Qur'an 12: 53)

In our time, the fitnah of wealth has led people to seek material possessions by any achievable means (for example, lying, cheating, or stealing), without any concern for whether the wealth is earned lawfully or unlawfully. Their primary concern is attaining wealth; they rationalize that the ends justify the means because they must take care of their needs and live a comfortable life. The associated trappings of status, prestige, and power enhance the appeal of wealth. For these reasons, some people deal in usury or interest, unfair business dealings, theft, and other unacceptable corrupt and exploitative practices as they

compete for the possessions of this world. This is ultimately a trial not only for themselves, but also for those whom they abuse and of whom they take advantage. Allah mentions:

﴿وَإِنَّهُ لِحُبِّ الْخَيْرِ لَشَدِيدٌ﴾ (سورة العاديات: ٨)

«And indeed he [man] is, in love of wealth, intense.» (Qur'an 100: 8)

﴿الْهَنَئُكُمُ التَّكَاثُرُ ۖ حَتَّى زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ﴾ (سورة التكاثر: ١-٢)

«Competition in [worldly] increase diverts you until you visit the graveyards.» (Qur'an 102: 1-2)

﴿زُيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ الشَّهَوَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ وَالْبَنِينَ وَالْقَنَاطِيرِ الْمُقَنْطَرَةِ مِنَ الذَّهَبِ وَالْفِضَّةِ وَالْخَيْلِ الْمُسَوَّمَةِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْحَرْثُ ۚ ذَلِكَ مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۗ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَقَابِ﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١٤)

«Beautified for people is the love of that which they desire — of women and sons, heaped-up sums of gold and silver, fine branded horses, and cattle and tilled land. That is the enjoyment of worldly life, but Allah has with Him the best return.» (Qur'an 3: 14)

﴿وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ عَاهَدَ اللَّهَ لَئِنْ آتَيْنَا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ لَنَصَّدَّقَنَّ وَلَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ﴾ (سورة التوبة: ٧٥-٧٦)

«And among them are those who made a covenant with Allah [saying]: If He should give us from His bounty, we will surely spend in charity, and we will surely be among the righteous. But when He gave them from His bounty, they were stingy with it and turned away while they refused.» (Qur'an 9: 75-76)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Indeed there is a fitnah for every Ummah, and the fitnah for my Ummah is wealth.» (A sound hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

«If the son of Adam were given a valley of gold, he would love to have a second one; if he were given the second one, he would love to have a third, for nothing fills the belly of Adam's son except dust. Allah forgives the one who (repents to Him and) begs for His pardon.» (Bukhari)

«By Allah, I do not fear poverty for you; rather I fear that you will enjoy ease and plenty like those who came before you, and that you will compete with one another as they did, and you will be destroyed as they were.» (A sound hadith recorded by Ibn Mâjah)

Another fitnah that is very apparent in our time is the fitnah of women (as mentioned in the Qur'anic verse above). The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) described women as the greatest test for men:

«I have not left behind me a fitnah more harmful to men than women.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

«Indeed, this world is sweet (delightful) and green (tempting), and Allah has enabled you to dwell in it, generation after generation, so that He sees what you will do. Therefore, beware of this worldly life and beware of women, for the first trial of the children of Israel was that of women.» (Muslim)

This in no way implies anything negative regarding women; it simply points to the stark reality that men are easily tempted by women. Satan and his allies seem to be targeting this weakness as they call for the presence of women in the workplace, the uncovering and beautification of women in public, and the mixing of genders. Satan has controlled many people through this fitnah by whispering to women, inspiring them to dress in attractive clothing, wear alluring perfume, and mingle easily with unrelated men. All of this has led to immorality, immodesty, and disgrace for the Muslim community. Allah mentions:

﴿يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُخَفِّفَ عَنْكُمْ وَخُلِقَ الْإِنْسَانُ ضَعِيفًا﴾ (سورة النساء: ٢٨)

«And Allah wants to lighten for you [your difficulties], and humankind was created weak.» (Qur'an 4: 28)

Humankind is weak with regard to following the commands of Allah and also concerning women.³⁹ The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«The son of Adam's share of adultery has been decreed for him, so he will inevitably get it. The adultery of the eyes is looking, the adultery of the ears is listening, the adultery of the tongue is speaking, the adultery of the hands is touching, and the adultery of the foot is walking. The heart longs and wishes, and the private parts either confirm that or deny it.» (Muslim)

A related fitnah is imitating the ways of the disbelievers. The call for the 'liberation' of women is primarily based upon this blind imitation. This imitation is not only in relation to women; it involves many other aspects of life including dress, customs, and even language. One might come across Arabs in the Middle East who cannot speak even a word of Arabic (the language of the noble Qur'an) due to their desire to imitate the disbelievers in every possible way. This has undoubtedly led to the destruction of the Islamic identity, particularly among our youth.

Desires may become objects of worship as the person becomes obsessed and devotes his or her time and energy to attaining them instead of focusing on worship of Allah. Allah mentions this phenomenon:

﴿أَرَأَيْتَ مَنْ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ أَفَأَنْتَ تَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ وَكِيلًا﴾

(سورة الفرقان: ٤٣)

«Have you seen the one who takes as his god his own desire? Then would you be responsible for him?» (Qur'an 25: 43)

³⁹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 2:430.

If desires are given free rein, they will cause a person to develop distorted goals and eventually to commit sins⁴⁰ that may have very negative consequences in both this life and the hereafter.

In fact, if desires and lusts are left unrestrained, they may become the primary focus of life. People become slaves to their desires, which take complete control of their lives. Their psychological contentment becomes tied to them, so that they find happiness only when these desires are fulfilled. Ibn Taymiyah states:

If he attains it [that is, what he desires], he is pleased and if he is unable to attain it, he becomes discontented. Such a person is the 'abd [slave] of what he desires of these matters and he is a slave of it, since slavery and servitude are in reality the enslavement and servitude of the heart. Thus, for whatever enslaves the heart and puts it under its servitude, the heart is then a slave of that object. This is why it is said: The slave [human] is free as long as he is content [with what Allah has given him] and the free one is a slave as long as he desires.⁴¹

Allah promises those who control their desires that they will be granted paradise:

﴿وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ ۖ فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَىٰ﴾ (٤١)

(سورة النازعات: ٤٠-٤١)

«But as for he who feared the position of his Lord and prevented the soul from [unlawful] inclination, then indeed paradise will be [his] refuge.» (Qur'an 79: 40-41)

Despite the apparent danger associated with the fitnah of desires, it is less dangerous than the fitnah of doubts. In essence, the two are related, for those who follow doubts are following their own desires.

⁴⁰ Zarabozo, *Purification of the Soul*, 395.

⁴¹ Ibn Abdulwahid, *Ibn Taymiyyah's Essay on Servitude*, 100-101.

Those who are immersed in desires may still have an opportunity to reach paradise (as long as they maintain the correct beliefs). On the other hand, the trial of doubts may lead them astray, in terms of beliefs, until they land in the hellfire forever.

Satanic trials

One of the major trials of humankind is that of Satan, who attempts to mislead people from the straight path and invites them to be companions of the hellfire. Allah warns humans about Satan, his workers, and their plots of deception:

﴿يَبْنَىٰٓءَآدَمَ لَا يَفْنَىٰكُمْ الشَّيْطَانُ كَمَا أَخْرَجَ أَبَوَيْكُم مِّنَ الْجَنَّةِ يَنزِعُ عَنْهُمَا لِبَاسَهُمَا لِيُرِيَهُمَا سَوْءَٰتِهِمَا ۚ إِنَّهُ يَبْرِكُكُمْ هُوَ وَقَبِيلُهُ مِّنْ حَيْثُ لَا تَرَوْنَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا الشَّيَاطِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ﴾ (٢٧)

«O children of Adam, let not Satan tempt you as he removed your parents from paradise, stripping them of their clothing to show them their private parts. Indeed, he sees you — he and his tribe — from where you do not see him. Indeed, We have made the devils allies to those who do not believe.» (Qur'an 7: 27)

﴿أَلَمْ أَعْهَدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَبْنَىٰٓءَآدَمَ أَن لَا تَعْبُدُوا الشَّيْطَانَ ۚ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ ۚ وَإِنْ أَعْبُدُونِي هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُّسْتَقِيمٌ﴾ (٦١) وَلَقَدْ أَضَلَّ مِنْكُمْ جِبِلًّا كَثِيرًا أَفَلَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْقِلُونَ﴾ (٦٢)

«Did I not enjoin upon you, O children of Adam, that you not worship Satan — [for] indeed, he is to you a clear enemy — and that you worship [only] Me? This is a straight path. He had already led astray from among you much of creation, so did you not use reason?»

(Qur'an 36: 60-62)

know that it is the truth from your Lord and [therefore] believe in it, and their hearts humbly submit to it. Indeed is Allah the Guide of those who have believed to a straight path.» (Qur'an 22: 52-54)

﴿...وَإِنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ لَيُوحُونَ إِلَىٰ أَوْلِيَآئِهِمْ لِيُجَادِلُوكُمْ وَإِنْ أَطَعْتُمُوهُمْ إِنَّكُمْ لَمُشْرِكُونَ﴾ (سورة الأنعام: ١٢١)

«...And indeed do the devils inspire their allies [among men] to dispute with you. If you were to obey them, indeed, you would be one who associates [others with Him].» (Qur'an 6: 121)

The Prophet (ﷺ) warned the believers about such doubts when he said:

«Satan will come to one of you and say: Who created this and that? Until he asks: Who created your Lord?

When he comes to that, one should seek refuge in Allah and stop (such idle thoughts).» (Bukhari and Muslim)

Satan is aware of the weakness of human beings, so he attempts to play on their whims and desires in order to distance them from Allah and their worship of Him. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: «When Allah formed Adam in paradise, He left him for as long as Allah willed He should leave him. Iblees started walking around him, looking at him, to see what he was. When he saw that he was hollow, he knew that he had been created in such a way that he would not be able to keep control.» (Muslim)

This means that humans would not be able to control their desires and ward off the whispering of Satan, because something that is hollow does not prevent anything from entering it. Of course, this does not mean that it is impossible to overcome Satan and one's desires, but in reality, it is a significant trial for human beings (and one that they face on a daily basis). Allah mentions:

﴿وَلَقَدْ صَدَّقَ عَلَيْهِمْ إِبْلِيسُ ظَنَّهُ فَاتَّبَعُوهُ إِلَّا فَرِيقًا مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

(سورة سبأ: ٢٠)

«And Iblees had already confirmed through them his assumption, so they followed him, except for a party of believers.» (Qur'an 34: 20)

This verse refers to the people of Sabâ', who were defiant and disobedient, although the meaning can be extended to apply to all of humankind. Iblees confirms his assumption that he can easily mislead humankind due to their weaknesses — but his powers do not impact true believers.

When the believers try to dedicate themselves to Allah through prayer and remembrance, Satan approaches them and attempts to interrupt their connection with Allah by whispering to them.

«'Uthmân ibn Abil-'Âs (رضي الله عنه) came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and said: O Messenger of Allah, Satan is coming between me and my prayer and making me confused in my recitation.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: That is a devil called Khanzab. If you feel his presence, seek refuge with Allah from him and spit (drily) to your left three times.

He ('Uthmân) said: I did that, and Allah took him away from me.» (Muslim)

Concerning those who are neglectful in remembering Him, Allah mentions that He will appoint, as a companion for each of them, a devil who will mislead and corrupt him or her even further. This is part of His punishment in this world, and whoever is led astray is the greatest of losers.

﴿وَمَنْ يَعْشُ عَنْ ذِكْرِ الرَّحْمَنِ نُقَيِّضْ لَهُ شَيْطَانًا فَهُوَ لَهُ قَرِينٌ﴾ (سورة الزخرف: ٣٦-٣٧)

(سورة الزخرف: ٣٦-٣٧)

﴿عَنِ السَّبِيلِ وَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُّهْتَدُونَ﴾ (سورة الزخرف: ٣٧)

«And whoever is blinded from remembrance of the Most Merciful — We appoint for him a devil, and he is to him a companion. Indeed, they [the devils] avert them from the way [of guidance] while they think that they are [rightly] guided.» (Qur'an 43: 36-37)

﴿وَإِخْوَانُهُمْ يَمُدُّوهُمْ فِي الْغَيِّ ثُمَّ لَا يَقْصِرُونَ﴾ (سورة الأعراف: ٢٠٢)

﴿But their brothers [who obey the orders of the devils] — the devils increase them in error; then they do not stop short.﴾ (Qur'an 7: 202)

This means that humankind does not stop short of the evil deeds that they are doing, and the devils do not stop short of luring them; they neither tire nor stop their whispering.⁴² Allah instructs the Prophet (ﷺ):

﴿وَأَنذِرْ عَلَيْهِم نَبَأَ الَّذِي ءَاتَيْنَاهُ ءَايَاتِنَا فَاسْلَخَ مِنْهَا فَاتَّبَعَهُ الشَّيْطَانُ فَكَانَ مِنَ
الْفَاوِينَ﴾ (سورة الأعراف: ١٧٥)

﴿And recite to them [O Muhammad] the news of him to whom We gave [knowledge of] Our signs, but he detached himself from them; so Satan pursued him, and he became of the deviators.﴾

(Qur'an 7: 175)

﴿الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَزَلْنَا الشَّيْطِينَ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ تَوَضَّعُوا لَهُمْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ﴾ (سورة مريم: ٨٣)

﴿Do you not see that We have sent the devils upon the disbelievers, inciting them [to evil] with [constant] incitement?﴾ (Our'an 19: 83)

Satan utilizes many other methods to lead humans astray. He attempts to make evil look good, gives pleasing names to forbidden things, tempts people to go to extremes, offers promises and hope, uses a gradual approach, and so on. His ultimate goal is to lead the human being into disbelief and idolatry. Failing that, he tries to tempt him or her into sinning and blocks or destroys the slave's acts of obedience to Allah.⁴³

⁴² Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 4:245-246.

⁴³ al-Ashqar, *The World of the Jinn and Devils*, 70-128.

The greatest of tribulations

The fitnah of doubts and misconceptions is a more severe form of fitnah in that it may lead to disbelief and polytheism. Losing one's home, spouse, child, or even a limb is insignificant in comparison to the loss of the correct 'aqedah. This is because losing one's belief system to Satan means losing one's chance for salvation in the hereafter. Dying in a state of disbelief and polytheism means dying in a state of utter loss and destruction. May Allah protect us from this evil end!

In essence, these tribulations are related to the matters of the heart, and if the heart were to stray, that would be the greatest loss. To love or to fear others more than Allah, for example, indicates sickness of the heart, weakness of belief, and lack of certainty. When individuals fear others more than Allah, they may refrain from speaking the truth, acting in a righteous manner, or even fulfilling their religious obligations. Allah asks:

﴿أَفَمَنْ شَرَحَ اللَّهُ صَدْرَهُ، لِلْإِسْلَامِ فَهُوَ عَلَى نُورٍ مِّن رَّبِّهِ ۖ فَوَيْلٌ لِلْقَاسِيَةِ قُلُوبُهُم مِّن

ذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أُولَىٰ لَكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

«So is one whose breast Allah has expanded to [accept] Islam, and he is upon [guided by] a light from his Lord [like one whose heart rejects it?] Then woe to those whose hearts are hardened against the remembrance of Allah. Those are in manifest error.»

(Qur'an 39: 22)

Hudhayfah reported:

«Once I was sitting with ‘Umar (رضي الله عنه), and he asked: Who among you remembers the statement of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) about afflictions?

Some people said: We heard it.

'Umar said: Maybe you mean the affliction caused to a man by his wife, money, and children or neighbour.

They said: Yes.

'Umar said: That is expiated by prayers, fasting and charity, but who heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) talking about the affliction that spreads like the waves of the sea?

People kept silent, and I (Hudhayfah) said: You need not be afraid of that. I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) saying: Afflictions will be exposed to the hearts like a straw carpet, straw by straw. When a heart accepts any, a black spot will be marked in that heart, and every heart that rejects it will be marked by a white spot. There will be two types of hearts: a rock-like white one, which no trial will affect as long as the earth and heavens remain, and the other a heart as black as an overturned cup, which will not enjoin any good deed or deny any vice except what it likes.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

The Prophet (ﷺ) supplicated to protect himself from the deviation of the heart:

«Narrated Shahr ibn Hawshab that he once asked the Mother of the Believers, Umm Salamah: O Mother of the Believers, what was the most frequent supplication of the Messenger of Allah while he was with you?

She replied: The supplication he made most often was: O You Who changes the hearts, establish my heart firmly upon Your religion.

She then said: I asked him: O Messenger of Allah, why do you so often supplicate with: O You Who changes the hearts, establish my heart firmly upon Your religion?

He replied: Umm Salamah, there is no human being whose heart is not between two of the fingers of Allah. For whomsoever He wills, he establishes it, and for whomsoever He wills, he allows it to deviate.

Mu'adh (one of the narrators of this hadith) then recited:

﴿رَبَّنَا لَا تُزِغْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً...﴾ (٨)

(سورة آل عمران: ٨)

«Our Lord, let not our hearts deviate after You have guided us, and grant us from Yourself mercy...» (Qur'an 3: 8)» (A sound hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

A profound reminder of what can happen to those whose beliefs and hearts deviate from the truth is provided in the second chapter of the Qur'an, *Soorat* (Chapter) al-Baqarah. Allah had provided the children of Israel with various signs and miracles (one of which was bringing the dead back to life), as well as many other blessings, yet they obstinately refused to submit and obey. For that reason, their hearts hardened to such an extent that they became like stones (or even harder). Allah describes it this way:

﴿ثُمَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَهِيَ كَالْحِجَارَةِ أَوْ أَشَدُّ قَسْوَةً وَإِنْ مِنَ الْحِجَارَةِ لَمَا يَتَفَجَّرُ مِنْهُ الْأَنْهَارُ وَإِنْ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَشَقَّقُ فَيَخْرُجُ مِنْهُ الْمَاءُ وَإِنْ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَهْبِطُ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾ (٧٤)

(سورة البقرة: ٧٤)

«Then your hearts became hardened after that, being like stones or even harder. For indeed, there are stones from which rivers burst forth, and there are some of them that split open and water comes out, and there are some of them that fall down for fear of Allah. Allah is not unaware of what you do.» (Qur'an 2: 74)

Allah compares their hearts to stones. From some stones, water comes out; others burst with springs and rivers, and still others fall down out of fear of Allah. In essence, these stones have more benefit than the hardened heart of a human being. The greatest danger, of course, would be to persist in that state with no opportunity to soften that heart.

Allah reminds the believers not to let their hearts become hardened, as happened to the Jews and the Christians before them:

﴿أَلَمْ يَأْنِ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ تَخْشَعَ قُلُوبُهُمْ لِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَمَا نَزَلَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ وَلَا يَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَطَالَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْأَمَدُ فَقَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ ﴿١٦﴾﴾

(سورة الحديد: ١٦)

«Has the time not come for those who have believed that their hearts should become humbly submissive at the remembrance of Allah and what has come down of the truth? And let them not be like those who were given the scripture before, and a long period passed over them, so their hearts hardened; and many of them are defiantly disobedient.»

(Qur'an 57: 16)

FUNDAMENTAL CAUSES OF TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

Following desires and doubts, corruption of intention, ignorance, and other forms of misguidance are not only tribulations in and of themselves, but they may also lead to further trials. Ultimately, however, the fundamental causes of trials and tribulations are disobedience, turning away from Allah, and abandoning the Sunnah of the Prophet of Allah (ﷺ).

This does not contradict the notion that believers are tested according to their level of faith. In reality, testing of the steadfast believers is a blessing in disguise and should serve to increase their faith and devotion even further. For disbelievers, trials serve initially as calls to return to Allah, and finally as punishments for those who obstinately refuse to obey and submit. It is a profound facet of Allah's wisdom that outside observers will be oblivious to the underlying purposes and reasons for the trials faced by others, automatically negating any claim to the right of judgement.

Disobedience and turning away from Allah

Allah mentions in several places in the Qur'an that whatever evil happens to humans is because of what their own hands have earned:

﴿مَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ سَيِّئَةٍ فَمِنْ نَفْسِكُمْ...﴾ (سورة النساء: ٧٩)

«What comes to you of good is from Allah, but what comes to you of evil [O humankind] is from yourself...» (Qur'an 4: 79)

﴿ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ﴾ (٤١)
(سورة الروم: ٤١)

«Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned so He [Allah] may let them taste part of [the consequences of] what they have done, that perhaps they will return [to righteousness].» (Qur'an 30: 41)

﴿وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِيمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُوا عَنْ كَثِيرٍ﴾ (٣٠) ﴿وَمَا أَنْتُمْ بِمُعْجِزِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا لَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ﴾ (٦٦) ﴿وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ الْجَوَارِ فِي الْبَحْرِ كَالْأَعْلَامِ﴾ (٣٣) ﴿إِنْ يَشَأْ يُسْكِنِ الرِّيحَ فَيَظْلَلْنَ رَوَاكِدَ عَلَى ظَهْرِهِ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ﴾ (٣٣) ﴿أَوْ يُوقِنَنَّ بِمَا كَسَبُوا وَيَعْفُ عَنْ كَثِيرٍ﴾ (٣٠) (سورة الشورى: ٣٠-٣٤)

«And whatever strikes you of disaster — it is from what your hands have earned, but He pardons much. You will not cause failure [to Allah] upon the earth, and you have not besides Allah any protector or helper. Of His signs are the ships in the sea, like mountains. If He willed, He could still the wind, and they would remain motionless on its surface. Indeed in that are signs for everyone patient and grateful. Or He could destroy them [sink them with violent winds] for what they earned, but He pardons much.» (Qur'an 42: 30-34)

﴿أَوَلَمَّْا أَصَابَتْكُمْ مُصِيبَةٌ قَدْ أَصَبْتُمْ مِثْلَيْهَا قُلْتُمْ أَنَّى هَذَا قُلْ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ﴾ (٦٥)
(سورة آل عمران: ١٦٥)

«Why [is it that] when a [single] disaster struck you [on the day of Uhud], although you had struck [the enemy in the battle of Badr] with one twice as great, you said: From where is this? Say: It is from yourselves [due to your sin]. Indeed, Allah is over all things competent.» (Qur'an 3: 165)

Towards the end of a long *hadith qudsi* (a *hadith* that was communicated to the Prophet ﷺ from Allah but that is not part of the Qur'an), the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said that Allah says:

«O My servants! It is only your deeds that I judge for you; then I recompense you for them. The one who finds good should praise and thank Allah; the one who finds other than this has no one to blame but himself.» (Muslim)

Allah mentions that whoever turns away from His remembrance and obedience will have a difficult and depressing life:

﴿وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْ ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ أَعْمَى﴾ (١٢٤) ﴿قَالَ رَبِّ لِمَ حَشَرْتَنِي أَعْمَى وَقَدْ كُنْتُ بَصِيرًا﴾ (١٢٥) ﴿قَالَ كَذَلِكَ أَنْتَ أَيْتَنَّا فَتَسْبِّحُنَا وَكَذَلِكَ الْيَوْمَ تُنْسَى﴾ (١٢٦) ﴿وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي مَنْ أَسْرَفَ وَلَمْ يُؤْمِنْ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ وَلَعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةِ أَشَدُّ وَأَبْقَى﴾ (١٢٧)
(سورة طه: ١٢٤-١٢٧)

«And whoever turns away from My remembrance — indeed, he will have a depressed [difficult] life, and We will gather [raise] him on the Day of Resurrection blind. He will say: My Lord, why have you raised me blind while I was [once] seeing? [Allah] will say: Thus did Our signs come to you, and you forgot [disregarded] them; and thus will you this day be forgotten. Thus do We recompense he who transgressed and did not believe in the signs of his Lord, and the punishment of the hereafter is more severe and more enduring.» (Qur'an 20: 124-127)

Disobedience leads to trials and tribulations. Allah provides a specific and direct example in the story of the Jews who defied their covenant and defied Allah's command to observe the sanctity of the Sabbath:

﴿وَسْأَلُهُمْ عَنِ الْقَرْيَةِ الَّتِي كَانَتْ حَاضِرَةَ الْبَحْرِ إِذْ يَعْدُونَ فِي السَّبْتِ إِذْ تَأْتِيهِمْ حِيتَانُهُمْ يَوْمَ سَبْتِهِمْ شُرَعًا وَيَوْمَ لَا يَسْبِتُونَ لَا تَأْتِيهِمْ كَذَلِكَ نَبْلُوهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْسُقُونَ﴾ (١٦٣)
(سورة الأعراف: ١٦٣)

«And ask them about the town that was by the sea — when they transgressed in [the matter] of the Sabbath — when their fish came

to them openly on their Sabbath day, and they [the fish] did not come to them on the day they had no Sabbath. Thus We made a trial for them because they were defiantly disobedient. ﴿ (Qur'an 7: 163)

On the day when fishing was prohibited for them, Allah caused the fish to swim close to the surface of the water so as to be easily visible; in contrast, on the days that fishing was allowed, the fish would stay away from them and be difficult to spot. Allah makes it clear that this test came to them because of their disobedience and rebellion.⁴⁴ The Jews resorted to deceitful measures to avoid honouring the Sabbath. The day before the Sabbath, they would place their nets and ropes in the water, and then on Saturday (their Sabbath day), the fish would come and be caught in the nets. At night, after the Sabbath had ended, they would go to collect the fish. Allah punished them for such deceitful and treacherous disobedience by transforming them into monkeys.⁴⁵

Another well-known story having to do with Jews is that of the cow; it is told in the second chapter of the Qur'an, which is named al-Baqarah (the Cow). Allah commanded that they slaughter a cow in order to determine (by way of a miracle) the identity of the person who had murdered a man from the village. The Jews were stubborn and disputed in the matter by asking many needless questions (such as the type of cow, its colour, and the like). If they had not argued, it would have been acceptable for them to slaughter any cow; however, because of their stubbornness and arrogance, Allah made it increasingly difficult for them until they were forced to look for a very specific cow. Eventually, they slaughtered the cow, but even then, they carried out the order reluctantly.⁴⁶ The key point is that defiance, stubbornness and disobedience bring further tests and

⁴⁴ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 4:188-189.

⁴⁵ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 1:253-254.

⁴⁶ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 1:258-260.

tribulations from Allah; ultimately, they bring punishment for refusal to submit.

In the story of the people of Sabâ', Allah again demonstrates what happens to those who turn away from Him:

﴿لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَبَإٍ فِي مَسْكِنِهِمْ آيَةٌ جَنَّتَانِ عَنْ يَمِينٍ وَشِمَالٍ كُلُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ. بَلَدَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ وَرَبُّ غَفُورٌ ﴿١٥﴾ فَأَعْرَضُوا فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ ذَوَاتِ أَكْثِلٍ خَمْطٍ وَأَثَلٍ وَشَيْءٍ مِنْ سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ ﴿١٦﴾ ذَلِكَ جَزَيْنَاهُمْ بِمَا كَفَرُوا وَهَلْ يُجْزَى إِلَّا الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿١٧﴾﴾ (سورة سبأ: ١٧)

«There was for [the tribe of] Sabâ' in their dwelling place a sign: two [fields of] gardens on the right and on the left. [They were told]: Eat from the provisions of your Lord, and be grateful to Him; a good land [have you] and a forgiving Lord. But they turned away [refusing], so We sent upon them the flood of the dam, and We replaced their two [fields of] gardens with gardens of bitter fruit, tamarisks and something of spare lote trees. [By] that We repaid them because they disbelieved, and do We [thus] repay except the ungrateful?»

(Qur'an 34: 15-17)

This particular story provides direct evidence that disasters come about as a result of people's disobedience and defiance towards Allah, along with their arrogance and ingratitude. The consequences in this life came in the form of a flood. In addition, their bountiful gardens were replaced by gardens containing bitter fruits. There are many similar examples throughout the Qur'an.

As mentioned in this story, their disobedience was due to arrogance. Allah mentions that He will punish those who are arrogant:

﴿... وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ اسْتَنكَفُوا وَاسْتَكْبَرُوا فَيُعَذِّبُهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا وَلَا يَجِدُونَ لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا ﴿١٧٣﴾﴾ (سورة النساء: ١٧٣)

«...But as for those who disdained and were arrogant, He will punish them with a painful punishment, and they will not find for themselves besides Allah any protector or helper.» (Qur'an 4: 173)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said (that Allah said):

«Might is His waist-cloth and majesty is His cloak, and whoever contends with Me (with regard to them), I shall punish him.» (Muslim)

Abandoning the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)

Abandoning the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is another major cause of trials and tribulations. It is connected to the first cause (turning away from Allah) because abandonment of the Sunnah entails direct disobedience of Allah, and the Sunnah and Hadith (the collected statements and actions of Prophet Muhammad [ﷺ]) are part of the revelation of Allah to humankind. Allah advises:

﴿لَا تَجْعَلُوا دُعَاءَ الرَّسُولِ بَيْنَكُمْ كَدُعَاءِ بَعْضِكُمْ بَعْضًا قَدْ يَعْلَمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَلْلُونَ مِنْكُمْ لَوْ آذًا فَلْيَحْذَرِ الَّذِينَ يُخَالِفُونَ عَنْ أَمْرِهِ أَنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ فِتْنَةٌ أَوْ يُصِيبَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ﴾ (سورة النور: ٦٣)

«Do not make [your] calling of the Messenger among yourselves as the call of one of you to another. Already Allah knows those of you who slip away, concealed by others. So let those beware who dissent from his [the Prophet's] order [his way, or his Sunnah,] lest fitnah strike them or a painful punishment.» (Qur'an 24: 63)

This verse is referring to the importance of addressing and treating the Prophet (ﷺ) with respect and honour. It also highlights the severe consequences of going against his orders (his complete methodology or Sunnah). The fitnah that might befall the Muslim includes various trials and afflictions, such as dissension or strife at the community

level (like the recent revolutions in the Arab world), and disbelief, polytheism, hypocrisy and innovation at both the individual and community levels.⁴⁷ The punishment in this world could refer to capital punishment for major sins according to Islamic law.⁴⁸ In terms of the hereafter, it refers to punishment in the hellfire.

The story of the Battle of Badr provides further evidence that disobedience or abandoning the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is a source of trials and tribulations in this life. In this battle, Allah ordered the angels to fight in support of the believers (in addition to sending other types of assistance and support). Allah reminds us:

﴿إِذْ يُوحِي رَبُّكَ إِلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ أَنْي مَعَكُمْ فَثَبِّتُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا...﴾ (سورة الأنفال: ١٢)

(سورة الأنفال: ١٢)

«[Remember] when your Lord inspired to the angels: I am with you, so strengthen those who have believed...» (Qur'an 8: 12)

As another way of helping the believers, He also cast fear into the hearts of the disbelievers:

﴿...سَأَلْتِي فِي قُلُوبِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الرُّعْبَ فَأَصْرَبُوا فَوْقَ الْأَعْنَاقِ وَأَصْرَبُوا مِنْهُمْ كُلَّ بَنَانٍ﴾ (سورة الأنفال: ١٢)

«...I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieved, so strike [them] upon their necks and strike from them every fingertip.»

(Qur'an 8: 12)

Allah cast fear, disgrace and humiliation into the hearts of the disbelievers, and He instructed the angels to strike them on the neck and fingers.⁴⁹ It was reported that the people could recognize the enemy soldiers who were killed by the angels by the wounds on

⁴⁷ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 7:133.

⁴⁸ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 7:134.

⁴⁹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 4:273-274.

their necks, fingers, and toes; these areas had marks as if they were branded with fire.⁵⁰

Allah then indicates the reason for the punishment and trials of the disbelievers in this life:

﴿ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ شَاقُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَمَنْ يُشَاقِقِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَاُكِبَ اللَّهُ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ﴾ (سورة الأنفال: ١٣)

«That is because they opposed Allah and His Messenger. Whoever opposes Allah and His Messenger — indeed, Allah is severe in penalty.» (Qur'an 8: 13)

Fear, humiliation, injury, and death are all types of Allah's penalties in this life for refusal to follow His guidance and the Sunnah of the Messenger (ﷺ). The evidence also indicates severe punishment for those who disobey Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ):

﴿...وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَإِنَّ لَهُ نَارَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدًا فِيهَا أَبَدًا﴾ (سورة الجن: ٢٣)

«...And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger — then indeed, for him is the fire of hell; they will abide therein forever.»

(Qur'an 72: 23)

﴿يَوْمَ تُقَلَّبُ وُجُوهُهُمْ فِي النَّارِ يَقُولُونَ يَلَيْتَنَّا أَطَعْنَا اللَّهَ وَأَطَعْنَا الرَّسُولَ﴾ (سورة الأحزاب: ٦٦)

«The day their faces will be turned about in the fire, they will say: How we wish we had obeyed Allah and obeyed His Messenger.»

(Qur'an 33: 66)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«The parable of me and you is as the example of a man who kindled a fire. When it illuminated all around him, moths and other creatures

⁵⁰ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 4:274.

started falling into the fire. He was trying to stop them, but they overwhelmed him and kept falling in. This is the parable of me and you. I am trying to restrain you and keep you away from the fire, but you overwhelm me and fall in.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

The Prophet (ﷺ) himself mentioned the reward for those who obey him, as well as the punishment for those who are disobedient:

«All of my nation will enter paradise except for those who refuse.

His Companions asked: Who would refuse?

He answered: Whoever obeys me will enter paradise; whoever disobeys me has refused (to enter paradise).» (Bukhari)

PURPOSES AND BENEFITS OF TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

When Allah ordains a matter, He does it only according to His complete wisdom. As human beings, we may or may not understand this wisdom; that is why we should never question the decree of Allah.

﴿لَا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ﴾

(سورة الأنبياء: ٢٣)

«He is not questioned about what He does, but they will be questioned.» (Qur'an 21: 23)

According to Islam, tribulations may serve a purpose in this life, whether or not humans are able to ascertain what it is. The various purposes may include testing the individual, expiating sins, increasing the reward or punishment, serving as a reminder, and purifying the soul, among others. In general, Allah has a purpose or plan for each and every tribulation, and it is mainly to benefit the individual in the hereafter. This is the ultimate advantage for human beings, since they will be judged in the hereafter according to their beliefs and deeds; those who have correct beliefs and whose good deeds are heavy on the scale will enter paradise. These concepts are often interrelated and are discussed in more detail below.

To distinguish true believers from disbelievers and hypocrites

﴿وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ﴾

(سورة العنكبوت: ١١)

«And Allah will surely make evident those who believe, and He will surely make evident the hypocrites.» (Qur'an 29: 11)

From the Islamic perspective, one of the fundamental purposes of trials and tribulations in this life is to distinguish between those who submit and those who refuse, to separate the believers from the disbelievers, and to separate the truthful from the lying hypocrites. Allah explains that if it were not for trials and tribulations, this objective would not be realized.

﴿أَحْسِبَ النَّاسَ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ﴾ (٢) ﴿وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكَاذِبِينَ﴾ (٣) (سورة العنكبوت: ٢-٣)

«Do the people think that they will be left to say: We believe — and they will not be tried? But We have certainly tried those before them, and Allah will surely make evident those who are truthful, and He will surely make evident the liars.» (Qur'an 29: 2-3)

﴿مَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيَذَرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَىٰ مَا أَنْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ حَتَّىٰ يَمِيزَ الْخَبِيثَ مِنَ الطَّيِّبِ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُطْلِعَكُمْ عَلَى الْغَيْبِ...﴾ (١٧٩) (سورة آل عمران: ١٧٩)

«Allah would not leave the believers in that [state] you are in [presently] until He separates the evil from the good. Nor would Allah reveal to you the unseen...» (Qur'an 3: 179)

﴿إِنْ يَمَسُّكُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَزَعٌ مِمَّا قَدْ مَسَّ الْقَوْمَ فَزَعٌ مِثْلُهُ وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَتَتَّخِذَ مِنْكُمْ شُهَدَاءَ ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ﴾ (١٤٠) (سورة آل عمران: ١٤٠)

«If a wound should touch you — there has already touched the [opposing] people a wound similar to it. These days [of varying conditions] We alternate among the people so that Allah may make evident those who believe and [may] take to Himself from among you martyrs — and Allah does not like the wrongdoers.»

(Qur'an 3: 140)

﴿أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تُدْخَلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَعْلَمِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا مِنْكُمْ وَيَعْلَمَ الصَّابِرِينَ﴾ (١٤٢) (سورة آل عمران: ١٤٢)

«Or do you think that you will enter paradise while Allah has not yet made evident those of you who fight in His cause and made evident those who are steadfast?» (Qur'an 3: 142)

﴿وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ حَتَّىٰ نَعْلَمَ الْمُجْتَهِدِينَ مِنْكُمْ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ أَخْبَارَكُمْ﴾ (٣١) (سورة محمد: ٣١)

«And We will surely test you until We make evident those who strive among you [for the cause of Allah] and the patient, and We will test your affairs.» (Qur'an 47: 31)

The presence and depth of human faith can never really be known until challenges are encountered. During these times, the truly faithful are distinguished from those of weak or insincere faith. The experience of traumatic events in life generally leads to a change in the strength of religious faith. It may cause the individual to become even stronger in faith, to become weaker, or to abandon it altogether, providing further evidence to distinguish the truthful from the liars.

The distinction between believers and disbelievers is not only in relation to belief in Allah. It also pertains to belief in the hereafter. It is possible for individuals to believe in God but to deny or doubt the existence and reality of the hereafter, in which case their faith is incomplete and they will be considered disbelievers.

﴿وَمَا كَانَ لَهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَأْتِيهِمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ مِمَّنْ هُوَ مِنْهَا فِي شَكٍّ ۚ وَرَبُّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَفِیْظٌ﴾ (٢١) (سورة سبأ: ٢١)

«And he [Satan] had over them no authority except [it was decreed] that We might make evident who believes in the hereafter from who is thereof in doubt. Your Lord, over all things, is Guardian.»

(Qur'an 34: 21)

Disbelief in the hereafter is often reflected in doubts regarding judgement and accountability. Those who do not believe that they will be held accountable for their choices and actions in this world are more likely to follow their own desires and be misguided. They may also use this as an excuse to rationalize persistent disbelief and disobedience.

The purpose of trials is not for Allah to find out something that He does not know, for Allah is All-Knowing. His knowledge encompasses everything that has happened in the past and everything that will occur in the future. Allah already knows which category each human being will fall into and thus who will go to paradise and who will enter the hellfire. The function of these tests is to fulfil Allah's complete justice and mercy on the Day of Judgement, when some people will be sent to the hellfire due to the choices that they made in this life while others will go to paradise due to their submission and obedience to Allah. Humans will only enter paradise due to the grace and mercy of Allah; their deeds alone are not enough.

«The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: The deeds of any of you will not save you (from the hellfire).

They (the people) asked: Even you (will not be saved by your deeds), O Messenger of Allah?

He replied: No, even I (will not be saved), unless and until Allah protects me with His grace and His mercy...» (Bukhari)

Part of Allah's mercy is that He increases the reward for good deeds. In any case, no human beings will be oppressed in the least, and they will not be able to argue against being placed in their given abodes. The trials and the tribulations that they faced in this life may be used as evidence either for them or against them.

The reawakening of the fitrah

During times of crisis, the spiritual side of humans is likely to be awakened as the *fitrah* attempts to break through — after having been obscured under layers of false beliefs, principles, ideals, and behaviours. The *fitrah* is the innate tendency to believe in the existence of Allah and to believe that He alone is worthy of worship. During the worst of times, humans call out to Allah, recognizing that He is the only One Who can rescue them in time of need. Allah points out this fact:

﴿وَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ الضُّرُّ دَعَانَا لِجَنْبِهِ أَوْ قَاعِدًا أَوْ قَائِمًا فَلَمَّا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُ ضُرَّهُ مَرَّ كَأَن لَّمْ يَدْعُنَا إِلَى ضُرِّ مَسَّهُ كَذَلِكَ زُيِّنَ لِلْمُسْرِفِينَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾

(سورة يونس: ١٢)

«And when affliction touches man, he calls upon Us, whether lying on his side or sitting or standing; but when We remove from him his affliction, he continues [in disobedience] as if he had never called upon Us to [remove] an affliction that touched him. Thus is made pleasing to the transgressors that which they have been doing.»

(Qur'an 10: 12)

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي يُسَيِّرُكُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ حَتَّى إِذَا كُنْتُمْ فِي الْفُلِكُمْ وَجَرَيْنَ بِهِم بِرِيحٍ طَيِّبَةٍ وَفَرِحُوا بِهَا جَاءَتْهَا رِيحٌ عَاصِفٌ وَجَاءَهُمُ الْمَوْجُ مِنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ وَظَنُوا أَنَّهُمْ أُحِيطَ بِهِمْ دَعَوُا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ لَئِنْ أَنجَيْنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ لَنُكَوِّنَنَّ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾ فَلَمَّا أَنجَيْنَاهُمْ إِذَا هُمْ يَبْغُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّمَا بَغْيُكُمْ عَلَى أَنْفُسِكُمْ مَتَّعَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا ثُمَّ إِلَيْنَا مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَنُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾﴾

(سورة يونس: ٢٣)

«It is He who enables you to travel on land and sea until, when you are on ships and they sail with them by a good wind and they rejoice therein, there comes a storm wind. The waves come upon them from

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«It is He who enables you to travel on land and sea until, when you are on ships and they sail with them by a good wind and they rejoice therein, there comes a storm wind. The waves come upon them from

everywhere, and they assume that they are surrounded [doomed], supplicating Allah, sincere to Him in religion: If You should save us from this, we will surely be among the thankful. But when He saves them, at once they commit injustice upon the earth without right. O humankind, your injustice is only against yourselves, [being merely] the enjoyment of worldly life. Then to Us is your return, and We will inform you of what you used to do. ﴿

(Qur'an 10: 22-23)

Turning to Allah and exercising humility

﴿وَإِذَا مَسَّ النَّاسَ ضُرٌّ دَعَوْا رَبَّهُمْ مُنِيبِينَ إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ إِذَا آذَاهُمْ مِنْهُ رَحْمَةٌ إِذَا فَرِيقٌ مِنْهُمْ بِرَبِّهِمْ يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾ لِيَكْفُرُوا بِمَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ فَتَمَتَّعُوا فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾﴾

(سورة الروم: ٣٣-٣٤)

﴿And when adversity touches the people, they call upon their Lord, turning in repentance to Him. Then when He lets them taste mercy from Him, at once a party of them associate others with their Lord, so that they will deny what We have granted them. Then enjoy yourselves, for you are going to know.﴾ (Qur'an 30: 33-34)

When people undergo trials, they repent to Allah and beseech Him to forgive their past sins. In this verse, the Arabic phrase for repenting to Allah is *munebeen ilayhi*. This involves turning to Allah's Lordship, and it particularly occurs during times of affliction and suffering, as noted in this verse. It is common to the believer and the disbeliever, to the righteous and the evildoer, and it is considered to be a component of human *fitrah*, as mentioned above. It is for this reason that one finds even the disbelievers and those distant from Allah calling out to Him during times of distress. Once the tribulation has passed, they return to their polytheism and their disbelief.

Humans are tested so that they may return to Allah in obedience after having strayed, and so that they may repent after having sinned. Allah explains:

﴿وَقَطَّعْنَاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أُمَمًا مِنْهُمْ الصَّالِحُونَ وَمِنْهُمْ دُونَ ذَلِكَ وَبَلَوْنَاهُمْ بِالْحَسَنَاتِ وَالسَّيِّئَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿١٦٨﴾﴾ (سورة الأعراف: ١٦٨)

﴿And We divided them throughout the earth into nations. Of them some were righteous, and of them some were otherwise. We tested them with good [times] and bad that perhaps they would return [to obedience].﴾ (Qur'an 7: 168)

There is another category of turning to Allah. This is for His special friends, and it entails turning to Allah's divinity with love and servitude. It encompasses four aspects: love for Allah, humility and submission to Him, turning to Him, and turning away from any besides Him. True believers hasten to rush to Allah, not only during times of tribulation but at all times. They seek His forgiveness, and they attempt to give up acts of disobedience and to increase their righteous deeds. Ibn Taymiyah states:

From the completion of Allah's blessings upon His believing servants is that He afflicts them with hardship and tribulation such as would make them turn back to Him and supplicate to Him alone, making their religion sincerely for Him, putting their hope in Him, and their hearts depending upon Him alone. This leads to their having absolute reliance in Him, their tasting the sweetness of faith, and their absolving themselves of shirk. All of these are blessings greater than the blessings of health, security, and luxury for all of these are merely bodily blessings which both the believer and nonbeliever experience. As for the blessings that are achieved by those who live by tawhid, they are beyond description, and every believer has a portion of this in accordance to his faith.⁵¹

⁵¹ Ibn Taymiyah, *The Relief from Distress*, 148.

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By sending calamities upon humans, Allah gives them the opportunity to turn to Him and to demonstrate humility before Him. Humility is a component of submission; it involves abandoning arrogance, pride, ostentation, and feelings of self-sufficiency and replacing them with meekness and submissiveness as a slave before the Creator. Tribulations facilitate both the development of these positive traits and the suppression of their destructive opposites, as Allah explains:

﴿وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمَمٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ فَأَخَذْنَاهُم بِالْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَضُرَّعُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾ فَلَوْلَا إِذْ جَاءَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا تَضَرَّعُوا وَلَكِن قَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾﴾

(سورة الأنعام: ٤٢-٤٣)

«And We have already sent [messengers] to nations before you [O Muhammad]; then We seized them with poverty and hardship that perhaps they might humble themselves [to Us]. Then why, when Our punishment came to them, did they not humble themselves? But their hearts became hardened, and Satan made attractive to them that which they were doing.» (Qur'an 6: 42-43)

﴿وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّن نَّبِيٍّ إِلَّا أَخَذْنَا أَهْلَهَا بِالْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَضُرَّعُونَ ﴿٩٤﴾﴾

(سورة الأعراف: ٩٤)

«And We sent to no city a prophet [who was denied] except that We seized its people with poverty and hardship that they might humble themselves [to Allah].» (Qur'an 7: 94)

﴿أَلَمْ يَأْنِ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ تَخْشَعَ قُلُوبُهُمْ لِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَمَا نَزَلَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ... ﴿١٦﴾﴾

(سورة الحديد: ١٦)

«Has the time not come for those who have believed that their hearts should become humbly submissive at the remembrance of Allah and what has come down of the truth...?» (Qur'an 57: 16)

﴿فَلَوْلَا إِذْ جَاءَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا تَضَرَّعُوا وَلَكِن قَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾﴾

(سورة الأنعام: ٤٣)

«Then why, when Our punishment came to them, did they not humble themselves? But their hearts became hardened, and Satan made attractive to them that which they were doing.» (Qur'an 6: 43)

This verse indicates that one of the purposes of trials is to make the person humble before Allah, expressing this humility by seeking refuge in Allah and turning to Him in sincere repentance and reliance.

Understanding the true meaning of tawh  ed

Tribulations assist the believer in understanding the true meaning of tawh  ed, because it is through the most difficult of times that we come to the realization that Allah is the Supreme Lord and Controller of the universe, and that nothing occurs except by His leave. With Allah is the power of creation and command:

﴿يَسْأَلُهُ مَن فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ هُوَ فِي شَأْنٍ ﴿٢٩﴾﴾

(سورة الرحمن: ٢٩)

«Whoever is within the heavens and earth asks Him; every day He is bringing about a matter.» (Qur'an 55: 29)

As such, tribulations manifest Allah's perfect dominion, authority, power and might in the universe. All this is connected to our understanding of the unity of Allah's Lordship.

We humbly recognize that we are weak, helpless creatures who have no power or strength of our own. We are at the mercy of Allah, and only He can save us from the turmoil of our situation. In reality, this is the ultimate blessing of trials and tribulations — that they compel us to fulfil our true purpose in life, which is to sincerely

believe in and worship Allah alone, without any partners. We come to recognize that we are in need of our Creator, the Almighty.

We call out to Him alone, seeking relief from our distress; we rely upon Him alone to remove the trial; and we beseech Him alone to forgive our errors. In reality, if all decrees were pleasurable, then the people would be deficient in their servitude to their Lord. In the face of disliked decrees, many aspects of servitude become possible: patience, humility, contentment, trust (in Allah), earnest prayer, and supplication. Thus we complete the second aspect of tawh  d: the oneness, or unity, of worship.

It is also through tribulations that we see Allah's perfect names and attributes manifested, such as those that reflect His power, might, and justice: *al-'Azeez* (The Exalted in Might), *al-Qadeer* (The All-Powerful), *al-Jabb  r* (The Compeller), *al-Qahh  r* (The Prevailing), *al-Kh  f  * (The Abaser, One Who Lowers), *al-Mudhill* (The One Who humbles), *al-Haseeb* (The Reckoner), *al-'Adl* (The Just), and so forth. One only needs to ponder over the stories of Noah (  ) and the flood; the destruction of the people of Lot (  ), the Thamood, and other nations; and other stories reflecting Allah's power and might to comprehend the ultimate supremacy and perfection of His abilities.

Tribulations also remind us of Allah's attributes of mercy, patience, love, and forgiveness for his creation: *ar-Rahm  n* (The Most Gracious), *ar-Ra  eem* (The Most Merciful), *al-Mu  aymin* (The Overseer), *al-Haleem* (The Forbearing), *al-Mujeeb* (The Responsive), *al-Ghafoor* (The Forgiving), *al-Gha  f  r* (The Perpetual Forgiver), and so forth. The cooling of the fire for Prophet Abraham (  ), the saving of Moses (  ) and his people from the Pharaoh, and the opening of Makkah for Prophet Muhammad (  ) are only a few examples of Allah's mercy and compassion for His servants.

These names and attributes may become apparent through other means, but trials and tribulations provide unique opportunities for the manifestation of a number of Allah's attributes. The emergence

of their effects in ongoing events in the world is a fulfilment and necessary result of Allah's complete perfection. This reflects belief in the oneness, or unity, of Allah's names and attributes.

Strengthening belief in Allah's qadr

One component of true faith in Allah is believing in His divine will and decree: that nothing, no matter how grand or insignificant, how obvious or subtle, happens in this universe except by the will and decree of Allah the Almighty. Trials and tribulations serve to strengthen this belief and move it from the realm of doubt to the realm of certainty. Allah informs us:

﴿ إِنَّا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْتَهُ بِقَدَرٍ ۚ وَمَا أَمْرُنَا إِلَّا أَوْحِدَةٌ كَلَمْحٍ بِالْبَصَرِ ۝٥٠﴾

(سورة القمر: ٤٩-٥٠)

«Indeed, all things We created with predestination [qadr]; Our command is but one, like a glance of the eye.» (Qur'an 54: 49-50)

﴿...وَكَانَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ قَدَرًا مَّقْدُورًا ۝٣٨﴾

(سورة الأحزاب: ٣٨)

«...And ever is the command of Allah a destiny decreed.»

(Qur'an 33: 38)

﴿...وَلَكِنْ لِّيَقْضِيَ اللَّهُ أَمْرًا كَانَ مَفْعُولًا ۝٤٢﴾

(سورة الأنفال: ٤٢)

«...But [it was] so that Allah might accomplish a matter already destined...» (Qur'an 8: 42)

﴿سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى ۝١ الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى ۝٢ وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى ۝٣﴾

(سورة الأعلى: ١-٣)

«Exalt the name of your Lord the Most High, Who created and proportioned, and Who destined and [then] guided.» (Qur'an 87: 1-3)

The Messenger of Allah (  ) said:

«The first thing that Allah created was the pen.

He then said to it: Write!

The pen asked: O Lord, what should I write?

He said: Write what is going to be.

It was then written in that very hour all that would happen, up to the Last Day.» (A sound hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood, at-Tirmidhi and Ahmad)

«Allah wrote the decrees of His creation fifty thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth, and His throne is above the water.» (Muslim)

As noted in these Qur'anic verses and sayings of the Prophet (ﷺ), Allah has recorded the decree, encompassing everything that will happen until the Day of Judgement, in the Preserved Tablet. Allah's decree includes four things: knowledge, writing, will and creation. Allah knew everything about the universe before He created it, and He wrote the decrees before the events occurred. Everything that occurs in the universe happens by the will of Allah. Everything that happens in the universe, including the actions of humans, has been created by Allah. In relation to tribulations, Allah mentions:

﴿مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ...﴾ (سورة التغابن: ١١)

«No disaster strikes except by permission of Allah...»

(Qur'an 64: 11)

﴿مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرَأَهَا إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ﴾

(سورة الحديد: ٢٢)

«No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves except that it is in a register before We bring it into being. Indeed that, for Allah, is easy.»

(Qur'an 57: 22)

Tribulations fortify belief in qadr, and this belief eliminates the despair that humans are prone to experience, as noted in the next verse of Soorat al-Hadeed:

﴿لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَى مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَاكُمْ...﴾ (سورة الحديد: ٢٣)

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«In order that you not despair over what has eluded you and not exult [in pride] over what He has given you...» (Qur'an 57: 23)

Individuals with strong faith will realize that whatever Allah has decreed for them is good, even if they are not able to comprehend the wisdom behind a particular decree. When an affliction occurs, they will realize that there is good and benefit for them in Allah's decree, even though it may appear to be bad or negative.⁵²

﴿...فَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا﴾ (سورة النساء: ١٩)

«...perhaps you dislike a thing and Allah makes therein much good.»

(Qur'an 4: 19)

﴿...وَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَعَسَى أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَكُمْ﴾

(سورة البقرة: ٢١٦)

﴿وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾

«...But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. Allah knows, while you know not.»

(Qur'an 2: 216)

Determining who does the best deeds

Another purpose of trials and tribulations is to determine whose actions are the best. It is during these times that our patience and our conduct are tested to the ultimate degree. Either we will maintain our composure and follow the practice of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in this regard or we will express ourselves like those in the days of ignorance. Allah informs us:

﴿إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لَهَا لِنَبْلُوهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا﴾

(سورة الكهف: ٧)

⁵² See Bin 'Abdi-s-Salaam, *Trials and Tribulations: Wisdom and Benefits*.

He then said to it: Write!

The pen asked: O Lord, what should I write?

He said: Write what is going to be.

It was then written in that very hour all that would happen, up to the Last Day.» (A sound hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood, at-Tirmidhi and Ahmad)

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(سورة الكهف: ٧)

⁵² See Bin 'Abdi-s-Salaam, *Trials and Tribulations: Wisdom and Benefits*.

«Indeed, We have made that which is on the earth adornment for it that We may test them [as to] which of them is best in deed.»

(Qur'an 18: 7)

﴿الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْغَفُورُ﴾

(سورة الملك: ٢)

«It is He who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed — and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving.»

(Qur'an 67: 2)

Expiation of sins

The pain and suffering that an individual faces in this life may result in the expiation of sins and evil deeds. The following are some of the many sayings of the Prophet (ﷺ) that confirm this fact:

«For every fatigue, disease, sorrow, sadness, hurt, or distress that befalls a Muslim, including a prick that he receives from a thorn, Allah expiates some of his sins.» (Bukhari)

«No believer is pricked by a thorn or more, but Allah will erase some of his sins because of it.» (Muslim)

«For every calamity that befalls a believer, including a thorn (that pricks him), some of his sins are erased or some of his sins are expiated.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

«For every pain, hardship, sickness or grief that befalls a believer, including the worry that befalls him, some of his bad deeds will be expiated.» (Muslim)

«It was narrated that 'Abdullâh said: I visited the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), and he was running a fever. I touched him with my hand and said: O Messenger of Allah, you are running a high fever.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: Yes, I am running a fever like that of two of you.

I said: Then you will have two rewards.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: Yes.

Then the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: For every Muslim who is afflicted with sickness or anything else, Allah will make his bad deeds fall just as trees shed their leaves.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

«Jabir ibn 'Abdullâh narrated that the Messenger of Allah visited Umm as-Sâ'ib (or Umm al-Musayyab) and asked: What is the matter with you, Umm as-Sâ'ib (or Umm al-Musayyab)? Why are you shivering?

She replied: I have a fever, may Allah not bless it.

He said: Do not revile fever, for it takes away the sins of the sons of Adam just as the bellows take away the impurities of iron.» (Muslim)

As part of His mercy, Allah brings forth into this life some of the punishment for sins. This is beneficial for us in the hereafter, because on the Day of Judgement, we will be judged according to our deeds. If our scale of good deeds is heavy, we will be successful, but if our scale of good deeds is light, we will be in despair. Tribulations serve to lighten the scale of bad deeds (through expiation of sins) and make heavy the scale of good deeds (with rewards for patience). Allah has an overall purpose or plan for these tribulations; His main purpose is to elevate individuals in the next life, either by saving them from the hellfire or by raising their status in paradise.

The expiation for sins in this life should also be considered a blessing from Allah, since that suffering is less severe than what will be experienced in the hereafter. Punishment in the hellfire is beyond our imagination, and we must appreciate Allah's mercy in giving us the opportunity to expiate sins in this life before reaching that final stage. Vivid descriptions of hellfire are presented in the Qur'an in order to help us cultivate this appreciation. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«When Allah wishes good for His slave, He hastens the punishment in this world. When He wishes something bad for His slave, He

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«When Allah wishes good for His slave, He hastens the punishment in this world. When He wishes something bad for His slave, He

withholds his sins from him until he appears before Him on the Day of Judgement.» (A reliable hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

The majority of scholars are of the opinion that expiation of sins through trials and tribulations only applies to minor sins. They cite the following hadith:

«The five daily prayers, the Friday prayer to the following Friday prayer, and (the fasting in the month of) Ramadan to the following Ramadan are expiations for the sins committed in between them, as long as major sins are avoided.» (Muslim)

From this hadith, we can conclude that the expiation is for minor sins only, and that this is contingent upon avoiding major sins. Committing major sins incurs the wrath and curse of Allah and destines one to the hellfire (although only temporarily for those who have some belief in their hearts). The majority of scholars hold that for all major sins, one must repent sincerely before they can be expiated and forgiven by Allah.⁵³ Who explains:

﴿إِنْ تَجْتَنِبُوا كَبَائِرَ مَا تُنْهَوْنَ عَنْهُ نُكَفِّرْ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَنُدْخِلَكُمْ مُدْخَلَ كَرِيمٍ﴾ (سورة النساء: ٣١)

«If you avoid the major sins which you are forbidden, We will remove from you your lesser sins and admit you to a noble entrance [into paradise].» (Qur'an 4: 31)

﴿وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَدْعُونَ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ وَلَا يَقْتُلُونَ النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا يَزْنُونَ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ يَلْقَ أَثَامًا ﴿٦٨﴾ يُضَاعَفْ لَهُ الْعَذَابُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ وَيَخْلُدْ فِيهِ مُهَانًا ﴿٦٩﴾ إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَئِكَ يُبْدِلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا ﴿٧٠﴾﴾ (سورة الفرقان: ٦٨ - ٧٠)

⁵³ Ibn Baz, "Fatwas of Ibn Baz," Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Portal of the General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta', www.alifta.net.

«And those who do not invoke with Allah another deity or kill the soul which Allah has forbidden [to be killed], except by right, and do not commit unlawful sexual intercourse. Whoever does that will meet a penalty. Multiplied for him is the punishment on the Day of Resurrection, and he will abide therein humiliated — except for those who repent, believe and do righteous work. For them, Allah will replace their evil deeds with good, and ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.» (Qur'an 25: 68-70)

Scholars have applied this principle to trials and tribulations, and the majority have concluded that tribulations expiate minor sins only, as has been mentioned. Ibn Hajar, however, was of the opinion that tribulations may expiate both major and minor sins, because the literal meaning of the hadith indicates a general principle. The meaning of expiation is either that the sins are covered or that any traces leading one to deserve punishment are erased. The amount of the expiation depends upon the severity of the disease or the specific trial.⁵⁴

Spiritual growth and purification of the soul

One of the main purposes of trials and tribulations is to assist the individual in purifying the soul, a process that is related to expiation of sins. As part of the human nature that Allah bestowed upon us, we have various tendencies and weaknesses that may hinder our complete and sincere submission to Allah and that may impede the development of a sincere and firm relationship with our Creator. These are, in fact, trials and tribulations themselves. Through the process of purification, augmented by the challenges of life, we may overcome weaknesses and enhance our obedience to Allah, leading to a closer relationship with Him. It is through this very relationship with Allah that true peace and happiness is found.

⁵⁴ Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bâri*, 124-125.

﴿...إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا﴾

(سورة الأحزاب: ٣٣)

﴿...Allah intends only to remove from you the impurity [of sin], O people of the [Prophet's] household, and to purify you with [extensive] purification.﴾ (Qur'an 33: 33)

With regard to one of the purposes of jihad, Allah mentions:

﴿وَلِيُمَحِّصَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَيَمْحَقَ الْكَافِرِينَ﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١٤١)

﴿And that Allah may purify the believers [through trials] and destroy the disbelievers.﴾ (Qur'an 3: 141)

Allah tests us in our weaker aspects so that we may take the opportunity to strengthen, to correct, and to purify ourselves. If our tests were only in relation to our strengths, we would not have to struggle as much, but then the benefits would not be as great. The degree of benefit is proportionate to the effort and struggle involved in dealing with the trials.

Allah does not want to harm us or to see us suffer. However, due to His ultimate wisdom, He knows the greater good — in the form of purification and spiritual development — that will be gained from such experiences. This is part of His favour upon us, without which we would be doomed.

﴿...مَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيَجْعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ حَرَجٍ وَلَٰكِنْ يُرِيدُ لِيُطَهِّرَكُمْ وَلِيُتِمَّ

(سورة المائدة: ٦)

نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ﴾ (Qur'an 5: 6)

An analogy is the relationship between fire and gold. Fire is like the tribulation that separates the individual's noble spiritual qualities (the gold) from the impurities of the soul (human weaknesses, desires, sins, and the like). If the impurities are allowed to remain, the soul

will remain tainted and unable to achieve its maximum potential in terms of spiritual growth.

Struggling with difficulties and hardships may bring about beneficial changes that urge us towards a higher level of spiritual insight and functioning than we enjoyed before the trauma occurred. When we recognize our own powerlessness in the face of such trials, and our absolute need for and dependence upon Allah, then the arrogance, false pride, desires, negligence, and other impurities will melt away. What will remain is pure submission to Allah, in the form of tawh  d.

This purification through tests is mentioned in the Qur'an in relation to the Battle of U  d, where the Companions faced a severe trial.

﴿...وَلِيَبْتَلِيَ اللَّهُ مَا فِي صُدُورِكُمْ وَلِيُمَحِّصَ مَا فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ

(سورة آل عمران: ١٥٤)

الصُّدُورِ﴾

﴿...[It was] so that Allah might test what is in your breasts and purify what is in your hearts, and Allah is Knowing of that within the breasts.﴾ (Qur'an 3: 154)

Trials and tribulations are presented to the believing men and the believing women to the extent that they may leave this world carrying no sins at all. Such believers will meet Allah on the Day of Judgement in the purest of conditions, easing their journey in the hereafter and facilitating the attainment of everlasting bliss. The Messenger of Allah (  ) said:

«Trials will not cease afflicting the believing men and the believing women in (relation to) themselves, their children, and their wealth, until they meet Allah without having any sins.» (A reliable hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

As mentioned earlier, purification in this world will protect the believers from more severe purification in the hereafter. In other words,

if individuals are purified in this life, then they will be absolved from punishment in the hereafter (assuming that they have not committed *shirk* [associating partners with Allah], which would land them in hellfire forever).

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) once visited a person who was suffering from fever, and he said:

«Be of good cheer, for Allah says: It is My fire that I have caused to overwhelm My believing slave in this world, to be his share of the fire in the hereafter.» (A reliable hadith recorded by Ibn Mâjah)

Only the purified believers will be able to enter paradise. After the believers have crossed the bridge over hell, they will be purified further by settling any wrongs that occurred among them in this world. When they enter paradise, they will be completely pure and will bear no negative feelings towards one another.⁵⁵ The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«The believers will be saved from the fire; then they will be kept on a bridge between paradise and hell. They will settle their accounts with one another for any wrongs that existed between them in this world, until they are purified and cleansed. Then they will be permitted to enter paradise. By the One in Whose Hand is the soul of Muhammad, each of them will know his dwelling in paradise better than he knew his dwelling in this world.» (Bukhari)

This is why the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«When a Muslim is struck with an affliction and says: Truly to Allah we belong, and truly to Him we shall return — and then says: O Allah, reward me for my loss and give me what is better than it — Allah will (listen and) do just that.» (Muslim)

The greatest reward, better than anything in this worldly life, is the attainment of Allah's pleasure and His paradise.

⁵⁵ al-Ashqar, *Paradise and Hell*, 156.

Increase in good deeds, rewards and rank in paradise

Trials and tribulations may also increase the good deeds and raise the rank of the believer; the more difficult and intense the hardship, trial or tribulation, the greater the reward. This increase in good deeds and reward is particularly true for those who do not carry the burden of sin (as a result of their sins having been cleansed through the trial itself or through other means).

The following hadith limits the role of trials to expiation:

«There is no trial that befalls a Muslim except that Allah makes it an expiation (for his sins), even the thorn that pricks him.» (Bukhari)

Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalâni mentions another narration that encompasses a greater meaning. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«No believer is pricked by a thorn or more, but Allah will raise him one degree in status or will erase a sin because of it.» (Muslim)

Ibn Hajar goes on to explain the new meaning that this hadith adds:

There is a probability that ‘or’ in the hadith is due to a doubt that was aroused in the mind of the narrator in the wording of the hadith, and there is a probability that ‘or’ is indicative of different types. This second probability is strongest, and on the basis of this interpretation, the meaning would be that Allah will write for him good deeds by it [the trial] if he did not have any sins, or remove from him his sins if he had them. In accordance to the first [case] is that one who does not have sins will have his rank raised commensurate with it [or in proportion to it]. And the favours [of Allah] are vast.⁵⁶

«It was also narrated that al-Aswad said: Some young men of the *Quraysh* (the dominant tribe in Makkah at the time of the Prophet's

⁵⁶ Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bâri*, 10:120.

mission) visited 'Â'ishah while she was in Mina, and they were laughing. She asked: Why are you laughing?

They replied: So-and-so stumbled on the tent rope and almost broke his neck (or lost an eye).

She cautioned: Do not laugh, for I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say: For every Muslim who is pricked by a thorn or more, it will be decreed that he rises one degree in status because of it, and one sin is erased.» (Muslim)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«For everything that befalls a believer, even a thorn that pricks him, Allah will record a good deed for him or make fall (erase) a bad deed.» (Muslim)

«Indeed, the extent of the reward will be in accordance with the extent of the trial (suffering). Indeed, when Allah loves a people, He tries them (with affliction).» (A reliable hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

As such, the believers obtain good deeds and rewards, and they are raised to a higher level due to their patience and their perseverance. Without the trials and the tribulations, they may not have reached such a high level on their own; this further demonstrates the wisdom and mercy of Allah's plan for life events. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«If a certain status has previously been decreed for a person by Allah, and he does not attain it by his deeds, Allah makes him suffer through his body, wealth, or children.

(Some narrators add:) Then He makes him bear it with patience, until He causes him to reach the status that Allah had previously decreed for him.» (A reliable hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

It should be noted that there is a disagreement among the scholars over whether or not patience is required in order to attain these rewards and benefits. In *Fath al-Bâri*, Imam Ibn Hajar mentions a hadith reported in the *Musnad* of Imam Aḥmad:

«'Abdur-Rahmân ibn Shaybah relayed that 'Â'ishah mentioned: The Prophet (ﷺ) was afflicted with pain, and he began to grieve and turn in his bed.

'Â'ishah asked him: If one of us (Companions) was to experience this, would you feel sympathy for him?

The Prophet (ﷺ) responded: Indeed, the pious are more firmly challenged. Surely for every affliction that befalls the believer, whether it is (as minor as the prick of) a thorn or greater, he is relieved of a sin and raised a level in rank because of it.» (Recorded by Aḥmad with a sound chain of narration)

Ibn Hajar writes:

This hadith comprises an appeal against Shaykh 'Izz ad-Deen ibn 'Abdus-Salâm's perspective in which he states: Some of the ignorant people thought that the afflicted person is rewarded, and this is an obvious mistake. Indeed, the reward and the punishment is upon the earnings, and calamities are not of this nature; rather, the reward comes from the patience and the contentment.⁵⁷

Ibn Hajar then comments on the words of al-'Izz ad-Deen ibn 'Abdus-Salâm:

The explanation of that appeal is that the authentic hadiths are explicit in ascertaining the reward by merely the occurrence of an affliction. As for the patience and the contentment, they are extra, and it is possible to be rewarded for them in addition to the reward for the calamity.

Al-Qarâfi states: Afflictions are certainly expiations whether or not they are combined with contentment. If they are combined with contentment, the expiation will be greater; without it, it will be less.

Ibn Hajar concludes:

⁵⁷ Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bâri*, 10:121.

That is as al-Qarâfi mentions, **but** what is established in this issue is that an affliction is expiation for a sin that equates it, and with contentment, one will get more reward. But if he does not have any sins, he will be compensated with a reward equal to the calamity.⁵⁸

Paradise is organized in varying grades and levels, with each level being distinct from the others; the higher levels contain the greater rewards. The believers will be placed in these levels according to the degree of their faith, submission, and good deeds in this life, with each being compensated precisely for what he or she earned. Allah explains:

﴿وَمَنْ يَأْتِهِ مُؤْمِنًا قَدْ عَمِلَ الصَّالِحَاتِ فَأُولَئِكَ لَهُمُ الدَّرَجَاتُ الْعُلَى ﴿٧٥﴾ جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ مَنْ تَزَكَّى ﴿٧٦﴾﴾ (سورة طه: ٧٥-٧٦)

«But whoever comes to Him as a believer having done righteous deeds — for those will be the highest degrees [in position]. Gardens of perpetual residence beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally. That is the reward of one who purifies himself.»

(Qur'an 20: 75-76)

﴿... يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾﴾ (سورة المجادلة: ١١)

«... Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees. Allah is Acquainted with what you do.»

(Qur'an 58: 11)

﴿وَلِكُلِّ دَرَجَةٍ مِمَّا عَمِلُوا وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٣٢﴾﴾ (سورة الأنعام: ١٣٢)

(سورة الأنعام: ١٣٢)

«And for all are degrees [positions resulting] from what they have done. Your Lord is not unaware of what they do.» (Qur'an 6: 132)

⁵⁸ Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bâri*, 10:121.

The differences among levels and ranks (in terms of rewards) in the hereafter are greater than the differences in this life; likewise, the differences among the conditions of people in the hereafter will be greater than those found in this life. Allah has revealed this to encourage us to strive even harder to acquire a higher level, with its associated rewards. We should not be content with simply being mediocre. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«The people of paradise will look at the people dwelling in the chambers above them in the same way that people look at a brilliant star shining far away on the horizon, in the East or the West, because of their superiority (in reward) over them.

People asked: O Messenger of Allah, are these the dwellings of the prophets, which no one else can attain?

He replied: No, by the One in Whose Hand is my soul, they are for the men who believed in Allah and in His messengers.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

Allah promises:

﴿مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَلْنَا لَهُ فِيهَا مَا نَشَاءُ لِمَنْ نُرِيدُ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ يَصْلَاهَا مَذْمُومًا مَدْحُورًا ﴿١٨﴾ وَمَنْ أَرَادَ الْآخِرَةَ وَسَعَى لَهَا سَعْيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَئِكَ كَانَ سَعْيُهُمْ مَشْكُورًا ﴿١٩﴾ كُلًّا نُمِدُّ هُنَا وَهُنَا مِنْ عَطَاءِ رَبِّكَ وَمَا كَانَ عَطَاءُ رَبِّكَ مَحْظُورًا ﴿٢٠﴾ أَنْظِرْ كَيْفَ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَلِلْآخِرَةِ أَكْبَرُ دَرَجَاتٍ وَأَكْبَرُ تَفْضِيلًا ﴿٢١﴾﴾ (سورة الإسراء: ١٨-٢١)

«Whoever should desire the immediate [worldly gratifications] — We hasten for him from it what We will to whom We intend. Then We have made for him hell, which he will [enter to] burn, censured and banished. But whoever desires the hereafter and exerts the effort due to it while he is a believer — it is those whose effort is ever appreciated [by Allah]. To each [category] We extend — to these and those — from the gift of your Lord, and never has the gift of your Lord been

restricted. Look how We have favoured [in provision] some of them over others. But the hereafter is greater in degrees [of difference] and greater in distinction. ﴿ (Qur'an 17: 18-21)

In the hereafter, the highest level is *firdaws*, which is located directly beneath the throne of Allah. This will be home to the prophets, the martyrs and those who attained the highest levels of submission in this life. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) will have the single highest position in paradise, located at the pinnacle of *firdaws*, and he said: «Whoever believes in Allah and His Messenger, offers prayer perfectly and fasts the month of Ramadan will be granted paradise as a right by Allah, no matter whether he fights in Allah's cause or remains in the land where he is born.

People asked: O Messenger of Allah, shall we acquaint the people with this good news?

He replied: Paradise has one hundred grades (and ranks) that Allah has reserved for the *mujâhideen* (those who strive in Allah's cause) who fight in His cause, and the distance between each of the two grades is like the distance between the heavens and the earth. When you ask for something, ask for *firdaws*, which is the best and the highest part of paradise. Above *firdaws* is the throne of the Most Merciful, and the rivers of paradise originate there.» (Bukhari)

Allah explains:

﴿لَا يَسْتَوِي الْقَاعِدُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ غَيْرُ أُولِي الضَّرَرِ وَالْمُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ الْمُجَاهِدِينَ بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ عَلَى الْقَاعِدِينَ دَرَجَةً ۚ وَلَا وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْحُسْنَىٰ وَفَضَّلَ اللَّهُ الْمُجَاهِدِينَ عَلَى الْقَاعِدِينَ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٩٥﴾ دَرَجَاتٍ مِّنْهُ وَمَغْفِرَةً وَرَحْمَةً ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿٩٦﴾﴾ (سورة النساء: ٩٦)

«Not equal are those believers remaining [at home] — other than the disabled — and the *mujâhideen* [who strive and fight] in the

cause of Allah with their wealth and their lives. Allah has preferred the *mujâhideen* through their wealth and their lives over those who remain [behind], by degrees. To both, Allah has promised the best [reward], but Allah has preferred the *mujâhideen* over those who remain [behind] with a great reward — degrees of [high position] from Him and forgiveness and mercy. Allah is ever Forgiving and Merciful. ﴿ (Qur'an 4: 95-96)

The *mujâhideen* suffer some of the greatest tribulations in this life, which is why they will be rewarded with such a high status in the hereafter. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said that those in the front ranks will be given the greatest rewards:

«The best of the martyrs are those who fight in the first rank and do not turn their faces away until they are killed. They will have the pleasure of occupying the highest dwellings in paradise. Your Lord will smile at them, and whenever your Lord smiles upon any of His slaves, that person will not be brought to account.» (A sound hadith recorded by Aḥmad)

Allah describes those with patience as also being rewarded with the highest position in paradise.

﴿أُولَٰئِكَ يُجْزَوْنَ الْغُرْفَةَ بِمَا صَبَرُوا وَيُلَقَّوْنَ فِيهَا مَنَاجِبَ ۖ وَسَلَامًا ﴿٧٥﴾ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا حَسُنَتْ مُسْتَقَرًّا وَمُقَامًا ﴿٧٦﴾﴾ (سورة الفرقان: ٧٥-٧٦)

«Those will be awarded the chamber [the most elevated portion of paradise] for what they patiently endured, and they will be received therein with greetings and [words of] peace, abiding eternally therein. Good is the settlement and residence. ﴿ (Qur'an 25: 75-76)

This refers to patience with regard to self-sacrifice, being a true slave of Allah, and being steadfast for the sake of Allah, even in the face of calamities.

Allah bestows His bounty as He wills upon whom He wills, either in this world or in the next. Disbelievers will receive their bounties

in this life only, because they will be prohibited from the rewards of the hereafter.

Punishment for sins and disobedience

For those who have sinned or transgressed the limits of Allah, tribulations may be a punishment for their transgressions. Sins lead to the removal of blessings and the sending of calamities and hardship. In many verses of the Qur'an, in the form of direct warnings, reminders, stories, and analogies, Allah mentions the reality of punishment for disbelief and evil deeds. He asks:

﴿أَفَأَمِنَ الَّذِينَ مَكَرُوا السَّيِّئَاتِ أَنْ يَخْسِفَ اللَّهُ بِهِمُ الْأَرْضَ أَوْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾ أَوْ يَأْخُذَهُمْ فِي تَقْلِبِهِمْ فَمَا هُمْ بِمُعْجِزِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾ أَوْ يَأْخُذَهُمْ عَلَى تَخَوُّفٍ... ﴿٤٧﴾﴾ (سورة النحل: ٤٥-٤٧)

Then do those who have planned evil deeds feel secure that Allah will not cause the earth to swallow them, or that the punishment will not come upon them from where they do not perceive? Or that He would not seize them during their [usual] activity, and they would not cause failure [escape from Him]? Or that He would not seize them gradually [in a state of dread]?... (Qur'an 16: 45-47)

In line with Allah's complete justice, the punishment must have been 'earned' and thus warranted, as mentioned previously. Allah would not punish a human being who does not deserve that consequence, just as He would not allow the guilty criminals to escape. He explains:

﴿مَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ سَيِّئَةٍ فَمِنْ نَفْسِكَ... ﴿٧٩﴾﴾ (سورة النساء: ٧٩)

What comes to you of good is from Allah, but what comes to you of evil [O humankind] is from yourself... (Qur'an 4: 79)

﴿وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِيمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُوا عَنْ كَثِيرٍ ﴿٣٠﴾﴾

(سورة الشورى: ٣٠)

And whatever strikes you of disaster — it is for what your hands have earned; but He pardons much. (Qur'an 42: 30)

﴿... فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَأَعْلَمْ أَنَّهَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُصِيبَهُمْ بِبَعْضِ ذُنُوبِهِمْ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِنَ النَّاسِ لَفَاسِقُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾﴾ (سورة المائدة: ٤٩)

...And if they turn away — then know that Allah only intends to afflict them with some of their [own] sins. Indeed, many among the people are defiantly disobedient. (Qur'an 5: 49)

﴿وَلَوْ لَا أَنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ مُصِيبَةٌ بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ فَيَقُولُوا رَبَّنَا لَوْلَا أَرْسَلْتَ إِلَيْنَا رَسُولًا فَنَتَّبِعَ آيَاتِكَ وَنَكُونُ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾﴾ (سورة القصص: ٤٧)

And if not that a disaster should strike them for what their hands put forth [of sins] and they would say: Our Lord, why did You not send us a messenger so we could have followed Your verses and been among the believers? (Qur'an 28: 47)

Out of His perfect justice, Allah has decreed that He will not change a bounty or a blessing that He has granted to someone except when it is due to the evil sins that the person has committed.

﴿... إِنْ أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِنَاسٍ خَيْرًا يَغْيُرْ مَا يَقُومُونَ حَتَّى يَغْيُرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِنَاسٍ شَرًّا فَلَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَالٍ ﴿١١﴾﴾ (سورة الرعد: ١١)

...Indeed, Allah will not change the [good] condition of a people until they change what is in themselves. When Allah intends for a people ill [punishment for their sins], there is no repelling it, and there is not for them besides Him any patron. (Qur'an 13: 11)

﴿ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَمْ يَكُ مُغَيِّرًا نِعْمَةً أَنْعَمَهَا عَلَى قَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغْيُرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٥٣﴾﴾ (سورة الأنفال: ٥٣)

«That is because Allah would not change a favour which He had bestowed upon a people until they change what is within themselves. Indeed, Allah is Hearing and Knowing.» (Qur'an 8: 53)

These verses signify that punishment and removal of blessings are due to one's sins and evil deeds. One is transformed from being in a state of goodness (including obedience, righteous deeds, and gratitude) to being in a state of disobedience and ingratitude; thus he or she turns from the causes that lead to Allah's pleasure towards the causes that invoke His wrath. The next verse says:

﴿كَذَابِ آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ ۖ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ كَذَبُوا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ فَأَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَأَغْرَقْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ ۖ وَكُلٌّ كَانُوا ظَالِمِينَ﴾ (سورة الأنفال: ٥٤)

«[Theirs is] like the custom of the people of Pharaoh and of those before them. They denied the signs of their Lord, so We destroyed them for their sins, and We drowned the people of Pharaoh. All [of them] were transgressors.» (Qur'an 8: 54)

Allah mentions that He destroyed the people of Pharaoh because of their sins. He took away the blessings that He had granted them, including gardens, springs, treasures, beautiful dwellings, and so forth. It is not Allah Who wronged them; they wronged themselves.⁵⁹

Due to His abundant mercy, Allah pardons many of our sins, more so than the ones for which He holds us to account. As a result, we will not suffer the consequences of every sin or error in the form of calamities and trials in this world. In reality, if it were not for Allah's mercy, not a single person would remain on this earth.

﴿وَلَوْ يَأْخُذُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بِمَا كَسَبُوا مَا تَرَكَ عَلَى ظَهْرِهِمَا مِنْ ذَاتِ بَرَةٍ ۚ وَلَكِنْ يُؤَخِّرُهُمْ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۖ فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَجْلُهُمْ فَأَبَٰتُ اللَّهُ كَانَ بِعِبَادِهِ بَصِيرًا﴾ (سورة فاطر: ٤٥)

⁵⁹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 4:340-341.

«And if Allah were to impose blame on the people for what they have earned, He would not leave upon the earth any creature. But He defers them for a specified term. When their time comes, then indeed Allah has ever been, of His servants, Seeing.» (Qur'an 35: 45)

Sins, in reality, are a punishment for being heedless, being forgetful, or refusing to submit to the Lord. When people turn their hearts away from Allah, they are more inclined to evil, to immoral deeds, and to following desires. Heedlessness and sins strengthen their resolve to commit more sins and weaken the will to repent until the desire to repent is removed completely from their hearts. Allah may abandon heedless sinners and leave them to themselves, their weak nature and desires, and Satan.

﴿وَلَوْ يَعْجَلُ اللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ الشَّرَّ اسْتِعْجَالَهُمْ بِالْخَيْرِ لَفُضِيَ إِلَيْهِمْ أَجْلُهُمْ ۚ فَنَذَرَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ﴾ (سورة يونس: ١١)

«And if Allah was to hasten for the people the evil [they invoke] as He hastens for them the good, their term would have been ended for them. But We leave the ones who do not expect the meeting with Us, in their transgression, wandering blindly.» (Qur'an 10: 11)

﴿وَنَقَلْبُ أَفْئِدَتَهُمْ وَأَبْصَارُهُمْ كَمَا لَا يُؤْمِنُوا بِهِ ۖ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَنَذَرُهُمْ فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ﴾ (سورة الأنعام: ١١٠)

«And We will turn away their hearts and their eyes just as they refused to believe in it [the revelation] the first time. We will leave them in their transgression, wandering blindly.» (Qur'an 6: 110)

﴿مَنْ يُضِلِلِ اللَّهُ فَكَأَيِّ هَادٍ لَهُ ۚ وَيَذَرُهُمْ فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ﴾ (سورة الأعراف: ١٨٦)

(سورة الأعراف: ١٨٦)

«Whoever Allah sends astray — there is no guide for him. He leaves them in their transgression, wandering blindly.» (Qur'an 7: 186)

﴿وَأَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ الْبُيُوتَ الَّذِي آتَيْنَاهُ آيَاتِنَا فَاسْلَخَ مِنْهَا فَاتَّبَعَهُ الشَّيْطَانُ فَكَانَ مِنَ
الْمُفْضِلِينَ﴾ (سورة الأعراف: ١٧٥)

﴿...recite to them [O Muhammad] the news of him to whom We gave [knowledge of] Our signs, but he detached himself from them; so Satan pursued him, and he became of the deviators.﴾
(Qur'an 7: 175)

Eventually, if the person continues to sin, his or her heart becomes covered and sealed with the stain of sins and evil deeds.⁶⁰

﴿كَذَٰلِكَ يَكُفِّرُ بَنَانًا عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ﴾ (سورة المطففين: ١٤)
﴿No! Rather, the stain has covered their hearts of that which they were earning.﴾
(Qur'an 83: 14)

On the other hand, sincerity, submission, devotion, and remembrance of Allah protect one from sins, as Allah explains:

﴿...كَذَٰلِكَ لِنَصْرِفَ عَنْهُ السُّوءَ وَالْفَحْشَاءَ إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُخْلَصِينَ﴾ (سورة يوسف: ٢٤)

﴿...Thus [it was] that We should avert from him evil and immorality. Indeed, he was of Our chosen [and sincere] servants.﴾ (Qur'an 12: 24)

Punishment of nations

﴿وَلَقَدْ أَهْلَكْنَا الْقُرُونََ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَمَّا ظَلَمُوا وَجَاءَهُم رُسُلُهُم بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَمَا
كَانُوا يَلْمِزُونَ﴾ (سورة يونس: ١٣)

﴿And We had already destroyed generations before you when they wronged, and their messengers had come to them with clear proofs, but they were not to believe. Thus do We recompense the criminal people.﴾
(Qur'an 10: 13)

⁶⁰ Ibn Qayyim, "The Effects of Sins," Salafipublications.com, <http://www.salafipublications.com/sps/> (accessed October 13, 2012).

The noble Qur'an details the stories of past nations who were completely destroyed due to their disobedience and disbelief. These stories are meant to be signs and reminders for all of humankind until the Day of Resurrection, but only individuals of understanding and insight will truly comprehend such warnings:

﴿وَأَنَّهُ أَهْلَكَ عَادًا الْأُولَىٰ وَثَمُودَ آفًا أَتَقَىٰ ۚ﴾ (سورة النجم: ٥٠-٥٥)
﴿وَأَطغى ۚ﴾ (سورة النجم: ٥٥-٥٥)

﴿And that He destroyed the first [people of] 'Âd and Thamood — and He did not spare [them] — and the people of Noah before. Indeed, it was they who were [even] more unjust and oppressing. And the overturned towns He hurled down and covered them by that which He covered. Then which of the favours of your Lord do you doubt?﴾
(Qur'an 53: 50-55)

The chapter of the Qur'an named after the prophet Hood (عليه السلام) details some of the stories of previous nations to whom prophets and messengers were sent, along with the consequences for their disbelief and rejection of the messengers. The chapter begins with a general admonition:

﴿الرَّكِيبُ أَحْكَمُ آيَاتِهِ ثُمَّ فَضَّلَتْ مِنْ لَدُنْ حَكِيمٍ خَبِيرٍ ۚ﴾ (سورة هود: ١-٤)
﴿لَكُمْ مِنْهُ نَذِيرٌ وَبَشِيرٌ ۚ﴾ (سورة هود: ١-٤)
﴿وَأَن أَسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّهُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ يُمَتِّعَكُمْ مَتَاعًا حَسَنًا إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى وَيُؤْتِ كُلَّ ذِي فَضْلٍ فَضْلَهُ ۚ وَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ كَبِيرٍ ۚ﴾ (سورة هود: ١-٤)
﴿اللَّهُ مَرْجِعُكُمْ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ۚ﴾ (سورة هود: ١-٤)

﴿Alif, Lâ, Râ. [This is] a book whose verses are perfected and then presented in detail from [One Who is] Wise and Acquainted [through a messenger, saying]: Do not worship except Allah. Indeed, I am to you from Him a warner and a bringer of good tidings [saying]: Seek forgiveness of your Lord and repent to Him, and He will let you enjoy a good provision for a specified term and give every doer of favour

his favour [reward]. But if you turn away, then indeed, I fear for you the punishment of a great day. To Allah is your return, and He is over all things competent. ﴿﴾ (Qur'an 11: 1-4)

This is the same basic message brought by all the prophets and messengers to their various nations from the beginning of time until the time of the seal of the prophets, Muhammad ibn 'Abdullâh (ﷺ). Due to Allah's absolute justice, nations were never punished without first receiving a warner and a warning.

The first story in this chapter is that of Prophet Noah (عليه السلام), who warned his people:

﴿وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ إِلَىٰ لَكُمْ نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٦٥﴾ أَنْ لَا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا اللَّهَ إِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٦٦﴾﴾ (سورة هود: ٢٥-٢٦)
 ﴿...Indeed, I am to you a clear warner that you not worship except Allah. Indeed, I fear for you the punishment of a painful day.﴾ (Qur'an 11: 25-26)

His people reacted arrogantly.

﴿قَالُوا يَبْنُوحُ قَدْ جَدَلْتَنَا فَأَكْثَرْتَ جِدْلَنَا فَأَيْنَا بِمَا نَعِدُنَا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾﴾ (سورة هود: ٣٢)
 ﴿They said: O Noah, you have disputed [opposed] us and been frequent in dispute of us. So bring us what you threaten us, if you should be of the truthful.﴾ (Qur'an 11: 32)

Noah was instructed to build a ship to save himself and his family.

﴿وَأَوْحَىٰ إِلَىٰ نُوحٍ أَنَّهُ لَنْ يُؤْمِنَ مِنْ قَوْمِكَ إِلَّا مَنْ قَدْ ءَامَنَ فَلَا تَبْتَئِسْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾ وَأَصْنَعِ الْفُلَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا وَوَحِّينَا وَلَا تَخْطِبْنِي فِي الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا إِنَّهُمْ مُّغْرَقُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾﴾ (سورة هود: ٣٦-٣٧)

﴿And it was revealed to Noah that: No one will believe from your people except those who have already believed, so do not be distressed by what they have been doing. Construct the ship under Our

observation and Our inspiration, and do not address Me concerning those who have wronged; indeed, they are [to be] drowned.﴾

(Qur'an 11: 36-37)

The promise of Allah came true; the people of Noah were drowned in the great flood. Allah explains:

﴿فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ فِي الْفُلِ وَأَغْرَقْنَا الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا فَانْظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُتَكِبِينَ ﴿٦٩﴾﴾ (سورة الأعراف: ٦٤)
 ﴿But they denied him, so We saved him and those who were with him in the ship, and We drowned those who denied Our signs. Indeed, they were a blind people.﴾ (Qur'an 7: 64)

﴿فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَتَبْجَتَهُ وَمَنْ مَعَهُ فِي الْفُلِ وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ خُلَفَاءَ وَأَغْرَقْنَا الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا فَانْظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُتَكِبِينَ ﴿٧٠﴾﴾ (سورة يونس: ٧٣)
 ﴿And they denied him, so We saved him and those with him in the ship and made them successors, and We drowned those who denied Our signs. Then see how was the end of those who were warned.﴾

(Qur'an 10: 73)

Another story in this chapter is that of the people of Lot (عليه السلام), who had disobeyed Allah by committing homosexual acts and other types of immorality. Prophet Lot (عليه السلام) invited them to worship and obey Allah alone, and he forbade their immoral and evil acts. They rejected his call and continued their transgressions and rebelliousness until their punishment became inevitable. Allah sent His angels to warn Prophets Abraham (عليه السلام) and Lot about what was to befall the people. Prophet Abraham attempted to plead with the angels to delay the punishment, but the angels replied:

﴿يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ أَعْرِضْ عَنْ هَذَا إِنَّهُ قَدْ جَاءَ أَمْرُ رَبِّكَ وَإِنَّهُمْ ءَاتِيهِمْ عَذَابٌ غَيْرُ مَرْدُودٍ ﴿٧١﴾﴾ (سورة هود: ٧٦)

«...O Abraham, give up this [plea]. Indeed, the command of your Lord has come, and indeed, there will reach them a punishment that cannot be repelled.» (Qur'an 11: 76)

Prophet Lot himself attempted to reason with his people in order to prevent the arrival of the punishment.

﴿وَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا لُوطًا سِئَاءَ بِهِمْ وَضَاقَ بِهِمْ ذَرْعًا وَقَالَ هَذَا يَوْمٌ عَصِيبٌ ﴿٧٧﴾ وَجَاءَهُ قَوْمُهُ يُهْرَعُونَ إِلَيْهِ وَمِنْ قَبْلُ كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ قَالَ يَنْقُومُ هَؤُلَاءِ بِنَائِي هُنَّ أَطْهَرُ لَكُمْ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلَا تُخْزُونِ فِي ضَيْفِي أَلَيْسَ مِنْكُمْ رَجُلٌ رَشِيدٌ ﴿٧٨﴾﴾ (سورة هود: ٧٧-٧٨)

«And when Our messengers [the angels] came to Lot, he was anguished for them and felt for them great discomfort and said: This is a trying day. His people came hastening to him, and before [this] they had been doing evil deeds. He said: O my people, these are my daughters; they are purer for you. So fear Allah and do not disgrace me concerning my guests. Is there not among you a man of reason?» (Qur'an 11: 77-78)

His people refused to give up their evil acts, so the angels instructed Prophet Lot and his followers (with the exception of his wife) to leave the city, and the punishment came upon them the following morning.

﴿فَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا جَعَلْنَا عَلَىٰهَا سَافِلَهَا وَأَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهَا حِجَارَةً مِّن سِجِّيلٍ ﴿٨٢﴾ مُّصَوَّرَةٍ مِّمَّا عِندَ رَبِّكَ وَمَا هِيَ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ بِبَعِيدٍ ﴿٨٣﴾﴾ (سورة هود: ٨٢-٨٣)

«So when Our command came, We made the highest part [of the city] its lowest and rained upon them stones of layered hard clay [which were] marked from your Lord. Allah's punishment is not [very] far from the wrongdoers.» (Qur'an 11: 82-83)

Punishment also befell the people of 'Ad, who were the first people to worship idols after the flood that occurred in Noah's time.⁶¹ Prophet Hood (عليه السلام) was sent to call them to the worship of Allah alone without partners, but they refused to heed his call.

﴿قَالُوا يَا هُوْدُ مَا جِئْتَنَا بِبَيِّنَةٍ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِتَارِكِي آلِهَتِنَا عَنْ قَوْلِكَ وَمَا نَحْنُ لَكَ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾ إِنْ نَقُولُ إِلَّا اعْتَرَاكَ بَعْضُ آلِهَتِنَا بِسُوْرَةٍ... ﴿٥٤﴾﴾ (سورة هود: ٥٣-٥٤)

«They said: O Hood, you have not brought us clear evidence, and we are not ones to leave our gods on your say-so. Nor are we believers in you. We only say that some of our gods have possessed you with evil [insanity]...» (Qur'an 11: 53-54)

Having been warned, they were later destroyed by a screaming wind because of their disbelief, disobedience, and arrogance.

﴿فَأَمَّا عَادٌ فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَقَالُوا مَنْ أَشَدُّ مِنَّا قُوَّةً أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ الَّذِي خَلَقَهُمْ هُوَ أَشَدُّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَكَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يَحْحَدُونَ ﴿١٥﴾ فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا صَرْصَرًا فِي أَيَّامٍ نَّحْسَاتٍ لِّنَذِقَهُمْ عَذَابَ الْخِزْيِ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَلَعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةِ أَخْزَىٰ وَهُمْ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿١٦﴾﴾ (سورة فصلت: ١٥-١٦)

«As for 'Ad, they were arrogant upon the earth without right and said: Who is greater than us in strength? Did they not consider that Allah Who created them was greater than them in strength? But they were rejecting Our signs. So we sent upon them a screaming wind during days of misfortune to make them taste the punishment of disgrace in the worldly life; but the punishment of the hereafter is more disgracing, and they will not be helped.» (Qur'an 41: 15-16)

﴿وَأَذْكُرُوا عَادَ إِذْ أَنْذَرَ قَوْمَهُ بِالْأَحْقَافِ وَقَدْ خَلَّتِ النَّذْرُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ إِلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا اللَّهَ إِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٨١﴾﴾ قَالُوا أَجِئْتَنَا لِنَأْفِكَنَّ عَنْ آلِهَتِنَا

⁶¹ Ibn Katheer, *Stories of the Prophets*, 114.

فَأَنبَأَ بِمَا تَعُدُّنَا إِن كُنتَ مِنَ الصّٰدِقِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾ قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَلِمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَأُبَلِّغُكُمْ مَا أُرْسِلْتُ بِهِ، وَلَئِكَفَىٰ أَرَبَكُمْ قَوْمًا بَٰجِلُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾ فَلَمَّا رَأَوْهُ عَارِضًا مُّسْتَقْبِلَ أَوْدِيهِمْ قَالُوا هَٰذَا عَارِضٌ مُّطْرًا بَلْ هُوَ مَا اسْتَعْجَلْتُمْ بِهِ رِيحٌ فِيهَا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٤﴾ تَدْمِرُ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ بِأَمْرِ رَبِّهَا فَأَصْبَحُوا لَا يُرَىٰ إِلَّا مَسَكِنُهُمْ كَذٰلِكَ نَجْزِي الْقَوْمَ الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(سورة الأحقاف: ٢١-٢٥)

«And mention [O Muhammad] the brother of 'Âd, when he warned his people in [the region of] al-Aḥqâf — and warners had already passed on before him and after him [saying]: Do not worship except Allah. Indeed, I fear for you the punishment of a terrible day. They said: Have you come to delude us away from our gods? Then bring us what you promise us, if you should be of the truthful. He said: Knowledge [of its time] is only with Allah, and I convey to you that with which I was sent; but I see you [to be] a people behaving ignorantly. When they saw it as a cloud approaching their valleys, they said: This is a cloud bringing us rain! Rather, it is that for which you were impatient: a wind, within it a painful punishment, destroying everything by command of its Lord. And they became so that nothing was seen [of them] except their dwellings. Thus do We recompense the criminal people.» (Qur'an 46: 21-25)

Prophet Ṣāliḥ (ﷺ) was sent to Thamood with the same message as the previous prophets, but they rejected his message as well and were seized by a piercing blast or cry.

﴿وَأَخَذَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا الصَّيْحَةَ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دِيرِهِمْ جَثِيمًا ﴿٦٧﴾ كَأَن لَّمْ يَغْنَوْا فِيهَا﴾ (سورة هود: ٦٧-٦٨)

«And the shriek seized those who had wronged, and they became within their homes [corpses] fallen prone as if they had never prospered therein. Unquestionably, Thamood denied their Lord; then away with Thamood.» (Qur'an 11: 67-68)

A similar fate was destined for the people of Madyan who rejected the message of Shu'ayb.

﴿وَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا نَجَّيْنَا شُعَيْبًا وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنَّا وَأَخَذَتِ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا الصَّيْحَةَ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دِيرِهِمْ جَثِيمًا ﴿٩٤﴾ كَأَن لَّمْ يَغْنَوْا فِيهَا﴾ (سورة هود: ٩٤-٩٥)

«And when Our command came, We saved Shu'ayb and those who believed with him, by mercy from Us. The shriek seized those who had wronged, and they became within their homes [corpses] fallen prone as if they had never prospered therein. Then away with Madyan, as Thamood was taken away.» (Qur'an 11: 94-95)

The Qur'an recounts many stories of past nations as reminders of punishments that occurred for disbelief and disobedience. The purpose of these reminders is to instil fear into the hearts of the defiant and encourage them to give up their disobedience.

﴿ذٰلِكَ مِنْ اَنْبَاِ الْقَرْيَةِ الَّتِي نَقَصْنٰ عَلَيْكَ مِنْهَا قَابًا وَّحَصِيدًا ﴿١٠٣﴾ وَمَا ظَلَمْتَهُمْ وَلٰكِنْ ظَلَمُوْا اَنْفُسَهُمْ فَمَا اَغْنَتْ عَنْهُمْ اِلٰهَتُهُمُ الَّتِي يَدْعُوْنَ مِنْ دُوْنِ اللّٰهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ لَّمَّا جَاءَ اَمْرُ رَبِّكَ وَمَا زَادُوْهُمْ غَيْرَ تَتٰبٍ ﴿١٠٤﴾ وَكَذٰلِكَ اَخَذَ الْقَرْيَةَ وَهِيَ ظٰلِمَةٌ اِنَّ اَخْذَهُ الْيَمُّ شَدِيْدٌ ﴿١٠٥﴾ اِنَّ فِيْ ذٰلِكَ لَايَةً لِّمَنْ خَافَ عَذَابَ الْاٰخِرَةِ ذٰلِكَ يَوْمٌ يَّجْمَعُ لَهٗ النَّاسُ وَذٰلِكَ يَوْمٌ مَّشْهُوْدٌ ﴿١٠٦﴾﴾ (سورة هود: ١٠٠-١٠٣)

«That is from the news of the cities, which We relate to you; of them, some are [still] standing and some are [as] a harvest [mowed down]. We did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves. They were not availed at all by their gods which they invoked other than Allah when there came the command of your Lord, and they did not increase them in other than ruin. Thus is the seizure of your Lord when He seizes the cities while they are committing wrong. Indeed, His seizure is painful and severe. Indeed in that is a sign for those who fear the punishment of the hereafter. That is a day for which the people will

be collected, and that is a day [which will be] witnessed.﴾

(Qur'an 11: 100-103)

﴿وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّن نَّبِيٍّ إِلَّا أَخَذْنَا أَهْلَهَا بِالْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ لَعَلَّهُمْ
يَضُرَّغُونَ ﴿٩٤﴾ ثُمَّ بَدَّلْنَا مَكَانَ السَّيِّئَةِ الْحَسَنَةَ حَتَّى عَفَوْا وَقَالُوا قَدْ مَسَّ آبَاءَنَا
الضَّرَّاءُ وَالسَّرَّاءُ فَأَخَذْنَاهُمْ بَغْتَةً وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٩٥﴾ وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ ءَامَنُوا
وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَٰكِن كَذَّبُوا فَأَخَذْنَاهُم بِمَا كَانُوا
يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾ أَفَأَمِنَ أَهْلُ الْقُرَىٰ أَن يَأْتِيَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا بَيِّنًا وَهُمْ نَائِمُونَ ﴿٩٧﴾ أَوَأَمِنَ
أَهْلُ الْقُرَىٰ أَن يَأْتِيَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا ضُحًى وَهُمْ يُلْعَبُونَ ﴿٩٨﴾ أَفَأَمِنُوا مَكْرَ اللَّهِ فَلَا
يَأْمَنُ مَكْرَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾﴾ (سورة الأعراف: ٩٤-٩٩)

﴿And We sent to no city a prophet [who was denied] except that We seized its people with poverty and hardship that they might humble themselves [to Allah]. Then We exchanged, in place of the bad [condition], good, until they increased [and prospered] and said: Our fathers [also] were touched with hardship and ease. So We seized them suddenly while they did not perceive. If only the people of the cities had believed in and feared Allah, We would have opened [bestowed] upon them blessings from the heaven and the earth; but they denied [the messengers], so We seized them for what they were earning. Then did the people of the cities feel secure from Our punishment coming to them at night while they were asleep? Or did the people of the cities feel secure from Our punishment coming to them in the morning while they were at play? Then did they feel secure from the plan of Allah? But no one feels secure from the plan of Allah except the losing people.﴾

(Qur'an 7: 94-99)

﴿وَكَمْ مِّن قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا فَجَاءَهَا بَأْسُنَا بَيِّنًا أَوْ هُمْ قَائِلُونَ ﴿١٠١﴾ فَمَا كَانَ دَعْوَاهُمْ إِذْ
جَاءَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا إِلَّا أَن قَالُوا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿١٠٢﴾﴾ (سورة الأعراف: ١٠١-١٠٢)

﴿And how many cities have We destroyed, and Our punishment came to them at night or while they were sleeping at noon. Their declaration,

when Our punishment came to them, was only that they said: Indeed, we were wrongdoers!﴾

(Qur'an 7: 4-5)

﴿...وَأُمُّ سَمِيعَهُمْ ثُمَّ يَمَسُّهُمْ مِنَّا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١١٨﴾﴾ (سورة هود: ٤٨)

﴿...But to other nations [of them] We will grant enjoyment; then there will touch them from Us a painful punishment.﴾ (Qur'an 11: 48)

﴿فَلَمَّا نَسُوا مَا ذُكِّرُوا بِهِ فَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم أَبْوَابَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَتَّى إِذَا فَرِحُوا بِمَا
أُوتُوا أَخَذْنَاهُمْ بَغْتَةً فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْلِسُونَ ﴿١٤٤﴾﴾ (سورة الأنعام: ٤٤)

﴿So when they forgot that by which they had been reminded, We opened to them the doors of every [good] thing until, when they rejoiced in that which they were given, We seized them suddenly, and they were [then] in despair. So the people that committed wrong were eliminated. Praise to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.﴾

(Qur'an 6: 44-45)

When one reflects upon these verses of the Qur'an and recent events in our world, the truth of the Qur'an becomes as evident as if the stories of past nations were being played out before our very own eyes. Nations that were at the pinnacle of worldly prosperity and success were levelled to rubble in a matter of minutes or hours.

﴿...فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دِيَارِهِمْ جِثِيمٌ ﴿٩٤﴾ كَأَن لَّمْ يَغْنَوْا فِيهَا...﴾ (سورة هود: ٩٤-٩٥)

(سورة هود: ٩٤-٩٥)

﴿...and they became within their homes [corpses] fallen prone as if they had never prospered therein...﴾ (Qur'an 11: 94-95)

Only the people of insight and those who fear Allah and the Day of Resurrection will perceive these signs and the message they are meant to convey to humans.

﴿إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّمَن خَافَ عَذَابَ الْآخِرَةِ...﴾ (سورة هود: ١٠٣)

﴿Indeed in that is a sign for those who fear the punishment of the hereafter...﴾ (Qur'an 11: 103)

﴿أَفَلَمْ يَهْدِ لَهُمْ كَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا قَبْلَهُمْ مِنَ الْقُرُونِ يَمْشُونَ فِي مَسْجِدِهِمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي النُّهَى﴾ (سورة طه: ١٢٨)

«Then has it not become clear to them how many generations We destroyed before them as they walk among their dwellings? Indeed in that are signs for those of intelligence.» (Qur'an 20: 128)

﴿أَفَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِن نَّشَاءُ نَحْصِفْ بِهِمُ الْأَرْضَ أَوْ نَسْقِطَ عَلَيْهِمْ كِسَفًا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّكُلِّ عَبْدٍ مُنِيبٍ﴾ (سورة سبأ: ٩)

«Then do they not look at what is before them and what is behind them of the heaven and earth? If We should will, We could cause the earth to swallow them or [could] let fall upon them fragments from the sky. Indeed in that is a sign for every servant turning back [to Allah].» (Qur'an 34: 9)

When Allah punishes a nation, even the innocent among them may be impacted.

﴿وَاتَّقُوا فِتْنَةً لَا تُصِيبَنَّ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْكُمْ خَاصَّةً وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ﴾ (سورة الأنفال: ٢٥)

«And fear a trial [affliction or punishment] which will not strike those who have wronged among you exclusively, and know that Allah is severe in penalty.» (Qur'an 8: 25)

Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said:

«If Allah sends punishment upon a nation, it falls upon the whole population indiscriminately; then they will be resurrected (and judged) according to their deeds.» (Bukhari)

This is particularly true when corruption has spread among the people. One of the reasons that the righteous people may also be punished is due to their failure to invite the wrongdoers to the truth and their failure to enjoin good and forbid evil. They failed to fulfil

the role ordained upon them by Allah as the best nation brought forth for humankind.

«Abu Bakr as-Şiddeeq said: O people, you recite this verse:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ مَن ضَلَّ إِذَا اهْتَدَيْتُمْ ...﴾ (سورة المائدة: ١٠٥)

«O you who have believed, upon you is [responsibility for] yourselves. Those who have gone astray will not harm you when you have been guided...» (Qur'an 5: 105)

I indeed heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) saying: When the people see the wrongdoer and do not take him by the hand (to stop him from wrongdoing), then soon Allah shall envelop you in a punishment from Him.» (A sound hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«By the One in Whose Hand is my soul! Either you command good and forbid evil, or Allah will soon send upon you a punishment from Him; then you will call upon Him, but He will not respond to you.» (A reliable hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

In reality, the tribulation or punishment is also a mercy from Allah because it provides an opportunity for repentance and turning back to Allah. Part of this mercy is that punishment in this life is less severe than that of the hereafter. As such, the calamities of this world serve to remind those who have strayed from the straight path and to call them back to that path.⁶²

﴿ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ﴾ (سورة الروم: ٤١)

⁶² The path ordained for humans by Allah in order to achieve success in this life and in the hereafter. It includes various beliefs and practices of Muslims as well as details of what is lawful and what is prohibited.

«Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned, so He [Allah] may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done, that perhaps they will return [to righteousness].»

(Qur'an 30: 41)

﴿وَلَنَذِيقَنَّهُمْ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَدْنَىٰ دُونَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَكْبَرِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ﴾

(سورة السجدة: ٢١)

«And We will surely let them taste the nearer punishment short of the greater punishment, that perhaps they will return [repent].»

(Qur'an 32: 21)

The 'nearer punishment' here refers to the tribulations, disasters, and calamities of this life. There is no turning back Allah's punishment once it has been decreed.

﴿لَهُ مُعَقِّبَاتٌ مِّن بَيْن يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِمَّنْ أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِأَن يَأْخُذَهُمْ لِيُغَيِّرَ مَا يَقَوْمُ حَتَّىٰ يَغْيُرُوا مَا بَنَفْسُهُمْ وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ سُوءًا فَلَا مَرَدَ لَهُ وَمَا لَهُم مِّن دُونِهِ مِن وَالٍ﴾

(سورة الرعد: ١١)

«For each one are successive [angels] before and behind him, who protect him by the decree of Allah. Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves. When Allah intends for a people ill,⁶³ there is no repelling it, and there is not for them besides Him any patron.»

(Qur'an 13: 11)

The guardian angels are mentioned here with reference to the punishment of Allah; they leave the person when it is time for the decreed punishment to occur. The punishment can neither be avoided nor delayed; it is inevitable. It serves as a reminder to call the person back to Allah, and it also presents a lesson to others. The Qur'an's stories of past nations that were destroyed, due to their disobedience to Allah, provide lasting examples of the power and wisdom of Allah's

⁶³ Meaning punishment or destruction because of their sins.

decree. The various natural disasters that we are experiencing in our times echo this message, which we should heed. Unfortunately, many do not heed the warnings.

﴿أَوَلَا يَرَوْنَ أَنَّهُمْ يُفْتَنُونَ فِي كُلِّ عَامٍ مَّرَّةً أَوْ مَرَّتَيْنِ ثُمَّ لَا يَتُوبُونَ وَلَا هُمْ يَذْكُرُونَ﴾

(سورة التوبة: ١٢٦)

«Do they not see that they are tried every year once or twice, but then they do not repent, nor do they remember?»

(Qur'an 9: 126)

One may wonder, "How does one distinguish between a trial and punishment?" The answer is that if the misfortune resulted from doing an act of obedience to Allah (for example, losing money when migrating for the sake of Allah, losing a job due to embracing Islam, or being wounded in jihad), then this would be considered a trial.

If, however, the misfortune results from sin (for example, an illness caused by smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol, or a sexually-transmitted disease contracted through an illegal relationship), then this is a type of punishment. If the misfortune cannot be linked to either good deeds or evil deeds (for example, the loss of a spouse or child, business failures, or some types of illnesses), then it depends upon the individuals. If they are devout, practicing Muslims, it is likely to be a trial; if they are prone to evil, it is likely to be a form of punishment.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Shaykh Abdul-'Azeez bin Abdullah bin Baaz, "When Does a Slave Know that a Trial is a Test or Punishment?," [Abdurrahman.org](http://abdurrahman.org/character/trial-test-or-punishment.html), <http://abdurrahman.org/character/trial-test-or-punishment.html> (accessed March 4, 2014).

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(سورة الرعد: ١١)

«For each one are successive [angels] before and behind him, who protect him by the decree of Allah. Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves. When Allah intends for a people ill,⁶³ there is no repelling it, and there is not for them besides Him any patron.» (Qur'an 13: 11)

The guardian angels are mentioned here with reference to the punishment of Allah; they leave the person when it is time for the decreed punishment to occur. The punishment can neither be avoided nor delayed; it is inevitable. It serves as a reminder to call the person back to Allah, and it also presents a lesson to others. The Qur'an's stories of past nations that were destroyed, due to their disobedience to Allah, provide lasting examples of the power and wisdom of Allah's

⁶³ Meaning punishment or destruction because of their sins.

decree. The various natural disasters that we are experiencing in our times echo this message, which we should heed. Unfortunately, many do not heed the warnings.

﴿أَوَلَا يَرَوْنَ أَنَّهُمْ يُفْتَنُونَ فِي كُلِّ عَامٍ مَّرَّةً أَوْ مَرَّتَيْنِ ثُمَّ لَا يَتُوبُونَ وَلَا هُمْ يَذْكُرُونَ﴾ (سورة التوبة: ١٢٦)

«Do they not see that they are tried every year once or twice, but then they do not repent, nor do they remember?» (Qur'an 9: 126)

One may wonder, "How does one distinguish between a trial and punishment?" The answer is that if the misfortune resulted from doing an act of obedience to Allah (for example, losing money when migrating for the sake of Allah, losing a job due to embracing Islam, or being wounded in jihad), then this would be considered a trial.

If, however, the misfortune results from sin (for example, an illness caused by smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol, or a sexually-transmitted disease contracted through an illegal relationship), then this is a type of punishment. If the misfortune cannot be linked to either good deeds or evil deeds (for example, the loss of a spouse or child, business failures, or some types of illnesses), then it depends upon the individuals. If they are devout, practicing Muslims, it is likely to be a trial; if they are prone to evil, it is likely to be a form of punishment.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Shaykh Abdul-'Azeez bin Abdullah bin Baaz, "When Does a Slave Know that a Trial is a Test or Punishment?," Abdurrahman.org, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/trial-test-or-punishment.html> (accessed March 4, 2014).

COPING WITH THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF THIS LIFE

Scientific researchers have discovered that in order to cope effectively during times of stress and struggle, people often revert to religious faith and their faith communities. They engage in religious coping in an attempt to find meaning and significance in the midst of stressful and traumatic circumstances. Religion adds meaning to complex circumstances such as suffering in the world, good and evil, 'apparent' injustice, and so forth. It also provides humans with spiritual, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses to these life events.⁶⁵

As the final and complete message for all of humankind, Islam provides the most comprehensive approach to understanding and coping with even the most challenging life experiences. If we were to simply follow the injunctions in the Qur'an and the Sunnah regarding this issue, the feelings of despair, grief, and hopelessness would wash away. The solutions lie within our own hands; it is up to us, as servants of Allah, to implement them.

The following section provides guidelines for responding to and coping with the trials and tribulations of life. This framework should provide the readers with the necessary knowledge and tools to attain maximum benefit from each and every test that comes their way in life.

⁶⁵ For a more detailed discussion of this research, see Koenig, King, and Carson, *Handbook of Religion and Health*.

Avoid seeking tribulations

While there are many benefits that may be obtained from trials and tribulations (such as expiation of sins, increase in rewards, and a raise in rank), this does not justify seeking out hardships in an attempt to acquire those benefits. Steadfast believers should not wish or pray for misfortunes or calamities to befall them, nor should they ask for their punishment to be brought forward in this world.

«Anas narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) visited a Muslim man who was sick and had grown as feeble as a chicken.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) asked him: Did you pray (to Allah) for anything or ask for it?

He replied: Yes, I used to say: O Allah, whatever punishment You would give me in the hereafter, bring it forward into this world.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: Glory be to Allah! You cannot bear it. Why did you not say: O Allah, give us good in this world and good in the hereafter and save us from the torment of the fire?

Then he prayed to Allah for him, and He healed him.» (Muslim)

Response to calamities

Throughout their lifetime, the believers are either in a state of gratitude to Allah or in a state of patience. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«The affair of the believer is amazing in that it is always good for him, and this is true only for a believer. If something joyful comes to him, he expresses his gratitude, and that is good for him. If something harmful comes to him, he is patient, and that is good for him.» (Muslim)

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah phrases it as follows:

There is neither strength nor power save in God Almighty. It is God we implore — and whose answer we await — to watch over you in this world and the next, to shower you with His graces,

outwardly and inwardly, and to make you among those who, when blessed, give thanks; when tried, persevere; and when sinful, seek forgiveness. For these three conditions are tokens of the servant's happiness [*sa'adat al-abad*], and the signs of his success in this world and the next. No servant is without them, but is always shifting from one to the other.

The first condition is the blessings which come to the servant from God (Most High), one after another. What secures them is gratitude [*shukr*], based on three supports: inward recognition of the blessing; outward mention and thanks for it; and its use in a way that pleases the One to whom it truly belongs and who truly bestows it. Acting thus, the servant shows his gratitude for the blessing — however brief.

The second is the trials from God (Most High) which test the Servant, whose duty therein is patience [*sabr*] and forbearance: to restrain himself from anger with what is decreed; to restrain his tongue from complaint; to restrain his limbs from offences, such as striking one's face in grief, rending one's clothes, tearing one's hair and like acts. Patience, then, rests on these three supports, and if the servant maintains them as he should, affliction will become benefaction, trial will change to bounty and what he disliked will become what he loves. For God (Exalted and Sublime) does not try the servant in order to destroy him. Rather, He tries him to put his patience and devotion [*al-ubudiyya*] to the test. For the servant owes devotion to God in affliction as in ease. He must have as much devotion in what he hates as in what he loves. And while most people offer devotion in what they love, it is important to do so in the things they hate. It is by this that servants' ranks are distinguished and their stations determined.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Ibn Qayyim, *The Invocation of God*, 1-2.

Shaykh al-'Uthaymeen mentions that human beings may respond to calamities in four different ways, each of which represents a progressively higher level of faith and submission.

1. **Discontentment** entails being displeased and angry with Allah and becoming upset with His decree. It may involve destructive and harmful behaviour such as tearing one's clothes or slapping one's cheeks. This category is prohibited in Islam, and engaging in it is sinful.
2. **Patience**, which is considered to be the obligatory response, implies that the affected individuals attempt to bear the calamity; even though they dislike it, their faith is strong enough to keep them from being in the first category of discontentment.
3. **Contentment**, which is recommended, means being pleased and satisfied with what Allah has decreed, indicating that the tribulation is not difficult for the individual to tolerate.
4. **Gratitude**, which is the highest level, entails being thankful to Allah for the hardship as the person realizes the benefits that may be attained (such as removal of sins and increased rewards).⁶⁷

1. Discontentment

During times of trial, human beings are prone to discontentment or displeasure not only with the challenges facing them, but also with the resulting hopelessness and despair that accompany this state. Allah says:

﴿لَا يَسْتَمُ الْإِنْسَانُ مِنْ دُعَاءِ الْخَيْرِ وَإِنْ مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ فَيَئُوسٌ قَنُوطٌ﴾

(سورة فصلت: ٤٩)

⁶⁷ al-'Uthaymeen, "Points of Benefit on Sabr (Patient Perseverance)," Abdurrahman.org, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/pob-Sabr.pdf> (accessed February 10, 2011).

﴿Man is not weary of supplication for good [things], but if evil touches him, he is hopeless and despairing.﴾ (Qur'an 41: 49)

﴿فَأَمَّا الْإِنْسَانُ إِذَا مَا ابْنَلَهُ رَبُّهُ فَأَكْرَمَهُ وَنَعَّمَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَكْرَمَنِ﴾ وَأَمَّا إِذَا مَا

ابْنَلَهُ فَقَدَّرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهْنَنِ﴾ (سورة الفجر: ١٥-١٦)

﴿And as for man, when his Lord tries him and [thus] is generous to him and favours him, he says: My Lord has honoured me.⁶⁸ But when He tries him and restricts his provision, he says: My Lord has humiliated me.﴾ (Qur'an 89: 15-16)

﴿إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعًا﴾ (١٦) إِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ جَزُوعًا﴾ (١٧) وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الْخَيْرُ مَنُوعًا﴾ (١٨)

(سورة المعارج: ١٩-٢١)

﴿Indeed, the human was created anxious: When evil touches him, impatient, and when good touches him, withholding [of it].﴾

(Qur'an 70: 19-21)

Discontent and despair are characteristics of the disbelievers who deny the signs of Allah, the Day of Judgement, and the hereafter.

﴿وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِعَايَةِ اللَّهِ وَلِقَائِهِ أُولَٰئِكَ يَئِسُوا مِنْ رَحْمَتِي وَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ

عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ﴾ (سورة العنكبوت: ٢٣)

﴿And the ones who disbelieve in the signs of Allah and the meeting with Him — those have despaired of My mercy, and they will have a painful punishment.﴾ (Qur'an 29: 23)

Discontentment occurs not only in relation to the test itself, but also with the decree of Allah. It is demonstrated through complaints of the heart, the tongue, and the body (shouting, slapping the face, tearing clothes, and so on). This is the lowest level, and obviously the believer should avoid falling into it.

⁶⁸ In other words, the human being is proud and attributes the favour to his own merit.

The other three levels are progressively higher stations, with each subsequent one bearing greater fruits and blessings. Each of these levels will be discussed in more detail below.

2. Patience

One of the greatest lessons of this life and a main purpose of trials and tribulations is the development of patience. Humankind is naturally prone to impatience, so an effort must be exerted to display its opposite: forbearance, tolerance, fortitude, and perseverance. Patience is not a virtue in name only; it implies a character trait that is demonstrated in a specific demeanour and prescribed manner of behaving. It is obligatory to be patient during times of trial and tribulation.

The believers are patient with what Allah has decreed for them, accepting it without asking, "Why me?" or "Why now?" They do not accuse Allah of injustice, for He is far above that. Patience demonstrates the believers' understanding that what has befallen them was preordained by Allah for a purpose. They do not harbour any ill feelings or resentment. Instead, they feel secure in the knowledge that Allah only decrees what is best for them. The patient ones may not be pleased with the test itself, but they should be satisfied with the will of Allah.

In fact, Allah commands the believers to be patient and to seek help through patience and prayer:

﴿...وَأَصْبِرُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ﴾ (سورة الأنفال: ٤٦)
 ﴿...and be patient. Indeed, Allah is with the patient.﴾ (Qur'an 8: 46)
 ﴿وَأَسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ إِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَى الْخَاشِعِينَ﴾ (سورة البقرة: ٤٥)
 ﴿And seek help through patience and prayer; and indeed, it is difficult except for the humbly submissive [to Allah].﴾ (Qur'an 2: 45)

﴿وَأَصْبِرْ وَمَا صَبْرُكَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا تَكُ فِي ضَيْقٍ مِمَّا يَمْكُرُونَ﴾ (١٢٧) إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ ﴿١٢٨﴾

(سورة النحل: ١٢٧-١٢٨)

﴿And be patient [O Muhammad], and your patience is not but through Allah. Do not grieve over them, and do not be in distress over what they conspire. Indeed, Allah is with those who fear Him and those who are doers of good.﴾ (Qur'an 16: 127-128)

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اصْبِرُوا وَصَابِرُوا وَرَابِطُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ٢٠٠)

﴿O you who have believed, persevere and endure and remain stationed and fear Allah that you may be successful.﴾ (Qur'an 3: 200)

Luqmân said to his son:

﴿يَبْنِىْ اِقِرْ الصَّلَاةَ وَاْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَاَنْهَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَاَصْبِرْ عَلَى مَا اَصَابَكَ اِنَّ ذٰلِكَ مِنْ عَزَمِ الْاُمُوْرِ﴾ (سورة لقمان: ١٧)

﴿O my son, establish prayer, enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and be patient over what befalls you. Indeed, [all] that is of the matters [requiring] determination.﴾ (Qur'an 31: 17)

Patience is a fundamental characteristic of the believers, distinguishing them from the disbelievers and the hypocrites. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«The example of a believer is that of a fresh tender plant; from whichever direction the wind comes, it bends, but when the wind becomes quiet, it becomes straight again. Similarly, a believer is afflicted with calamities (but he remains patient until Allah removes his difficulties). An impious wicked evildoer is like a pine tree, which stays hard and straight until Allah cuts (breaks) it down when he wishes.» (Bukhari)

Allah promises that those who are patient will receive their due reward. It is for this reason that the patient believers anticipate the reward for their steadfastness.

﴿قُلْ يَاعِبَادَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةٌ وَأَرْضُ اللَّهِ وَاسِعَةٌ إِنَّمَا يُوَفَّى الصَّابِرُونَ أَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ﴾ (سورة الزمر: ١٠)

«Say: O My servants who have believed, fear your Lord. For those who do good in this world is good, and the earth of Allah is spacious. Indeed, the patient will be given their reward without account [limit].»

(Qur'an 39: 10)

﴿أُولَٰئِكَ يُؤْتَوْنَ أَجْرَهُم مَّرَّتَيْنِ بِمَا صَبَرُوا وَيَدْرَءُونَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ السَّيِّئَةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ﴾ (سورة القصص: ٥٤)

«Those will be given their reward twice for what they patiently endured and [because] they avert evil through good, and from what We have provided them they spend.»

(Qur'an 28: 54)

﴿وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنْسَكًا لِّيَذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَىٰ مَا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنْ بَهِيمَةٍ ۚ الْأَنْعَمُ فَالْيَهُكُمْ إِلَهُ وَحْدَفَلَهُ أَسْلِمُوا وَبَشِّرِ الْمُخْبِتِينَ﴾ (سورة الحج: ٣٤)

«And [O Muhammad] give good tidings to the humble [before their Lord] who, when Allah is mentioned, their hearts are fearful, and [to] the patient over what has afflicted them, and the establishers of prayer and those who spend from what We have provided them.»

(Qur'an 22: 34-35)

The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«The affair of the believer is amazing in that it is always good for him, and this is true only for a believer. If something joyful comes to him, he expresses his gratitude, and that is good for him. If something harmful comes to him, he is patient, and that is good for him.» (Muslim)

The Prophet (ﷺ) said that Allah says:

«I have no reward other than paradise for a believing slave of mine who remains patient for My sake when I take away his beloved one from among the inhabitants of this world.» (Bukhari)

There is no better gift than patience. In fact, it is something that humans cannot develop on their own; rather, it is a gift that Allah bestows upon those who strive and those who deserve the blessing. The evidence indicates that Allah assists the believers in remaining steadfast and firm, and the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«No one is given any gift greater or more bountiful than patience.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

«Narrated Abu Sa'eed: Some people from the *Anṣār* (the Muslim citizens of Madinah who gave refuge to the Prophet [ﷺ] and the other Muslim emigrants from Makkah) asked Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) (to give them something), and he gave to every one of them who asked him until there was nothing left. When everything was gone, and he had spent all that was in his hand, he said to them: (Know) that if I have any wealth, I will not withhold it from you (to keep for somebody else); (know) that the one who refrains from begging from others (or doing prohibited deeds) will be granted by Allah contentment and no need of others. Upon the one who remains patient, Allah will bestow patience, and upon the one who is satisfied with what he has, Allah will bestow self-sufficiency. Indeed, there is no gift better and more vast (that you may be given) than patience.» (Bukhari)

The story of a dark-skinned woman at the time of the Prophet (ﷺ) provides evidence of the level of patience that is required during trials and calamities.

«Ibn 'Abbâs said: This dark-skinned woman came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and said: Verily, I get seizures and I become uncovered. Pray to Allah for me.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said: If you wish, be patient and you will have paradise, or if you wish, I can pray to Allah to cure you.

She said: I will be patient.

Then she added: But I become uncovered. Do pray to Allah for me that I not get uncovered.

The Prophet (ﷺ) prayed for her.» (Bukhari)

Patience must be at the first strike of the tribulation, not later.

«The Prophet (ﷺ) passed by a woman who was weeping beside a grave, and he instructed her to fear Allah and to be patient.

She said to him: Go away, for you have not been afflicted with a calamity like mine.

She did not recognize him, but then she was informed that he was the Prophet (ﷺ). She went to the Prophet's house and did not find any guard there.

She said to him: I did not recognize you.

He said: Verily, patience is at the first stroke of the calamity.» (Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dâwood and Ibn Mâjah)

In the end, the trials and the tribulations benefit the individuals if they demonstrate patience and they rely upon Allah. They should cling to the hope of earning great rewards from Allah as a consequence of submitting to Him and the events that He has planned. They should avoid what is prohibited in terms of discontentment and anger, for those only distance them from the pleasure and the rewards of Allah.

3. Contentment

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Indeed, the extent of the reward will be in accordance with the extent of the trial (suffering), and indeed, when Allah loves a people He tries them (with afflictions). So whoever is content (or pleased with Allah's decree), then for him is (Allah's) pleasure, and whoever is angry (or displeased), then for him is (Allah's) anger.» (A reliable hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«I ask Your pleasure after Your decree.» (A sound hadith recorded by an-Nasâ'i and al-Hâkim)

Contentment is among the highest stations; it entails being satisfied and pleased with what Allah has commanded and with what He has decreed for His slaves. It means to be content with what He wills and plans, recognizing that what He has decreed and apportioned is for the benefit of His slaves, whether He gives or withholds. It means that the heart meets all of His decrees with satisfaction, joy, pleasure, and tranquillity, no longer having any preference of its own concerning the matter. All decrees and judgements are left to the Most Wise and Just of Planners. Contentment leads to placing one's trust in Allah alone, seeking His help, and relying upon Him.

Humans are naturally pleased with those elements of predestination that match their natural inclinations, and there is nothing extraordinary in that contentment. Contentment also comes easily when one is blessed with money, a good spouse and children, and so on. What is remarkable is being pleased and satisfied with predestination that causes pain, suffering, and loss, and that conflicts with one's natural inclinations. This is the authentic expression of contentment: being pleased not only with Allah's Will, but also with the tribulation itself. It also means to avoid complaining to others regarding the hardship, for this implies complaining about one's Lord. Reaching this level requires struggle and effort, as does anything that contains within it incredible fruits and benefits. It is achievable, though, for those with a pure soul, strong faith, and high ambitions.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) exemplified this contentment when his son Ibrâheem died. The death of a child may lead a slave to express resentment and anger, through speech or behaviour, toward Allah's predestination, so the Prophet (ﷺ) teaches us:

«The heart grieves and the eye weeps, but we do not say except that which pleases the Lord.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

Those who are able to raise themselves to the level of being pleased and content with what Allah has decreed for them, even in terms of trials and tribulations, will enter the paradise of this world. The ones who enter the paradise of this world will enter the paradise of the hereafter, Allah willing. The paradise in this world is the certainty that there is wisdom in the trials, because certainty accompanies contentment. It is also the realization that the trial itself is a blessing, due to the beneficial effects it produces on the heart and in bringing one closer to Allah.

From this, tranquillity, peace of mind, and security descend upon the soul, comprising one of Allah's greatest blessings for His slave. Thus, contentment shields one from displeasure and the resultant worries, grief, anxiety, doubt, and thoughts of Allah that are not befitting Him. A heart that is free of the burdens of worldly life, with its concerns and grief, is able to devote itself to the worship of its Lord.

Ultimately, the one who is pleased with the decree of Allah achieves Allah's pleasure, both in this life and in the hereafter. It is through Allah's pleasure that one is able to enter the gardens of paradise.

﴿قَالَ اللَّهُ هَذَا يَوْمُ يَنْفَعُ الصَّادِقِينَ صِدْقُهُمْ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرَى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ﴾ (سورة المائدة: ١١٩)

«Allah will say: This is the day when the truthful will benefit from their truthfulness. For them are gardens [in paradise] beneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever, Allah being pleased with them, and they with Him. That is the great attainment.» (Qur'an 5: 119)

﴿وَالسَّابِقُونَ السَّابِقُونَ أُولَئِكَ الْأُولُونَ مِنَ الْمُهَاجِرِينَ وَالْأَنْصَارِ وَالَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُمْ بِإِحْسَانٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرَى تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ﴾ (سورة التوبة: ١٠٠)

«And the first forerunners [in the faith] among the *Muhâjireen* [emigrants] and the *Anshâr* and those who followed them with good conduct. Allah is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him; He has prepared for them gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever. That is the great attainment.»

(Qur'an 9: 100)

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَئِكَ هُمْ خَيْرُ الْبَرِيَّةِ ﴿٧﴾ جَزَاءُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ عَدْنٍ تَجْرَى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ﴾ (سورة البقرة: ٧-٨)

«Indeed, they who have believed and done righteous deeds — those are the best of creatures. Their reward with Allah will be gardens of perpetual residence beneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever, Allah being pleased with them and they with Him. That is for whoever has feared his Lord.» (Qur'an 98: 7-8)

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ﴿٧﴾ ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً ﴿٨﴾ فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي ﴿٩﴾ وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي﴾ (سورة الفجر: ٢٧-٣٠)

«[To the righteous it will be said]: O reassured soul, return to your Lord well-pleased and pleasing [to Him], and enter among My [righteous] servants and enter My paradise.» (Qur'an 89: 27-30)

﴿... أُولَئِكَ كَتَبَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَأَيَّدَهُم بِرُوحٍ مِنْهُ وَيُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرَى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ أُولَئِكَ حِزْبُ اللَّهِ أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ اللَّهِ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ﴾ (سورة المجادلة: ٢٢)

«... Those — He has decreed within their hearts faith and supported them with spirit from Him. We will admit them to gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally. Allah is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him — those are the party of Allah. Unquestionably, the party of Allah — they are the successful.»

(Qur'an 58: 22)

It is noted in these verses that Allah is pleased with His servants who submit to Him and obey His commands, and who are pleased with Him and all that He has ordained. The attainment of Allah's pleasure is among the greatest rewards in this life and in the hereafter.

﴿وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسْكَنٍ طَيِّبَةٍ فِي جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ﴾
(سورة التوبة: ٧٢)

«Allah has promised the believing men and believing women gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally, and pleasant dwellings in gardens of perpetual residence; but approval from Allah is greater. It is that which is the great attainment.» (Qur'an 9: 72)

The difference between patience and contentment is that the patient person feels pain in the heart but does not express it through words or behaviour, nor does the person do anything that would displease Allah. The person who is content does not even feel pain or sorrow in the heart, and it is the same whether the calamity is present or absent.⁶⁹ The patient one is pleased with Allah's will, while the one who is content is pleased not only with Allah's will but also with the difficult experience itself.

4. Gratitude

Gratitude is one of the characteristics of the believer, as mentioned in the hadith above:

«...If something joyful comes to him, he expresses his gratitude, and that is good for him...» (Muslim)

In the Qur'an, Allah commands the believers to be grateful to Him. Before grieving over blessings that they may have lost, they

⁶⁹ al-'Uthaimen, "Points of Benefit on Sabr (Patient Perseverance)," Abdurrahman.org, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/pob-Sabr.pdf> (accessed February 10, 2011).

should appreciate the blessings that they have been granted. Allah commands:

﴿...وَأَشْكُرُوا لِلَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ﴾
(سورة البقرة: ١٧٢)
«...be grateful to Allah if it is [indeed] Him that you worship.»
(Qur'an 2: 172)

﴿فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِي وَلَا تَكْفُرُونِ﴾
(سورة البقرة: ١٥٢)
«So remember Me; I will remember you. Be grateful to Me, and do not deny Me.»
(Qur'an 2: 152)

﴿...فَابْتَغُوا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الرِّزْقَ وَاعْبُدُوهُ وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ﴾
(سورة العنكبوت: ١٧)
«...So seek from Allah provision, and worship Him and be grateful to Him. To Him you will be returned.»
(Qur'an 29: 17)

In reality, the command to be grateful to Allah is another blessing for His servants because it is they who ultimately benefit from the gratitude, both in this world and in the hereafter. Allah does not need anyone's gratitude; on the contrary, the slaves need it for themselves. Of course, no one will ever be able to express sufficient gratitude to Allah for the numerous bounties that He has bestowed upon His creatures; they are too vast to enumerate. Allah mentions:

﴿وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا لُقْمَانَ الْحِكْمَةَ أَنْ اشْكُرْ لِلَّهِ وَمَنْ يَشْكُرْ فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ حَمِيدٌ﴾
(سورة لقمان: ١٢)

«And We had certainly given Luqmân wisdom [and said]: Be grateful to Allah. Whoever is grateful is grateful for [the benefit of] himself, and whoever denies [His favour] — then indeed, Allah is Free of Need and Praiseworthy.»
(Qur'an 31: 12)

Being grateful to Allah is one way to increase Allah's favours upon oneself and to acquire further blessings. It also guards and preserves the bounties that an individual possesses, and it assists the individual

in coping with the trials and the tribulations of this life when they occur.

﴿وَإِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ﴾ (سورة إبراهيم: ٧)

«And [remember] when your Lord proclaimed: If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favour]; but if you deny, indeed, My punishment is severe.» (Qur'an 14: 7)

Gratitude is also a means of being saved from the punishment of Allah.

﴿مَا يَفْعَلُ اللَّهُ بِعَذَابِكُمْ إِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ وَءَامَنْتُمْ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ شَاكِرًا عَلِيمًا﴾ (سورة النساء: ١٤٧)

«What would Allah do with [gain from] your punishment if you are grateful and believe? Ever is Allah Appreciative and Knowing.» (Qur'an 4: 147)

Prophet Solomon realized the importance of gratitude. When he ordered that the throne belonging to the Queen of Sheba be brought to him, he said:

﴿... هَذَا مِنْ فَضْلِ رَبِّي لِيَبْلُوَنِي أَأَشْكُرُ أَمْ أَكْفُرُ وَمَنْ شَكَرَ فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ رَبِّي غَنِيٌّ كَرِيمٌ﴾ (سورة النمل: ٤٠)

«...This is from the favour of my Lord, to test whether I will be grateful or ungrateful. Whoever is grateful — his gratitude is only for [the benefit of] himself; whoever is ungrateful — then indeed, my Lord is Free of Need and Generous.» (Qur'an 27: 40)

Gratitude during times of tribulation requires that the believers appreciate the benefits that may be gained from the calamity, such as expiation of sins and increase in rank, and that they appreciate the fact that the calamity could constitute a punishment that is brought forward in this life (thereby saving them from a greater punishment

in the next life). The believers are also grateful that the calamity is not related to their religion (which would be the most severe catastrophe), that it is not more severe (particularly given the possibilities in the world), and that the rewards obtained will be more than they expect or can even imagine.⁷⁰

The utmost gratitude is that felt during times of trials and tribulations. Ibn Taymiyah states:

An even higher level is that the servant thanks Allah for the calamity that has afflicted him because he sees this to be from His beneficence to him. This is because it is a means for the expiation of his sins, the raising of his rank, his repenting to Allah, humbling himself before Him, and making his reliance (*tawakkul*) and reverential hope (*raja'a*) sincerely for Him Alone and not the creation.⁷¹

In relation to supplications at these higher levels, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah states:

So there may be for the servant a need that is permissible for him to ask Allah to fulfill, so he earnestly beseeches his Lord in requesting it until the sweetness of his calling out and imploring is opened for him, and [the sweetness of] his humbleness and submissiveness between His hands. And he seeks to draw near to Him through His Names and Attributes and tawheed, and his heart becomes void of everything besides Him and he has no attachment to other than Him with regard to his needs. This would not have occurred without the [need and the] earnest appeal... To have opened within his heart — while imploring — from the cognizance of Allah and love of Him, and submissiveness and humility to Him, what would make him forget his need. And what is revealed from that

⁷⁰ al-'Uthaimeen, "Points of Benefit on Sabr (Patient Perseverance)," Abdurrahman.org, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/pob-Sabr.pdf> (accessed February 10, 2011).

⁷¹ Ibn Taymiyah, *The Friends of Allah*, 275.

becomes dearer to him than his need, to such an extent that he prefers to continue in this state, and it is more preferable to him than [fulfillment of] his need. So his happiness due to this [state] is greater than the happiness he would have experienced if the need had been fulfilled immediately and it [i.e., the experience] had passed. Some of those who have recognized (the signs of Allah) have stated: 'At times, I would have a need [that I wish to ask] Allah, so I would ask Him for it. So it would be opened for me from my beseeching and cognizance of Him and humbling myself to Him and submissiveness between His hands, that I would love that He delays the response to my need and that I would continue in this state.'⁷²

5. Return to disbelief and disobedience

The unfortunate reality is that after experiencing a tribulation and its associated spiritual growth, humans often return to their previous condition; often, it is as if they had not experienced any tribulation at all. Allah mentions their return to disbelief after adversity:

﴿وَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ الضُّرُّ دَعَانَا لِجَنْبِهِ أَوْ قَاعِدًا أَوْ قَائِمًا فَلَمَّا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُ ضُرَّهُ مَرَّ كَأَن لَّمْ يَدْعُنَا إِلَى ضُرِّ مَسَّهُ كَذَلِكَ زُيِّنَ لِلْمُسْرِفِينَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾
(سورة يونس: ١٢)

«And when affliction touches man, he calls upon Us, whether lying on his side or sitting or standing; but when We remove from him his affliction, he continues [in disobedience] as if he had never called upon Us to [remove] an affliction that touched him. Thus is made pleasing to the transgressors that which they have been doing.»

(Qur'an 10: 12)

﴿وَإِذَا مَسَّكُمُ الضُّرُّ فِي الْبَحْرِ ضَلَّ مَنْ تَدْعُونَ إِلَّا إِلَٰهًا فَلَمَّا نَجَّيْكُم إِلَى الْبَرِّ أَعْرَضْتُمْ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ كَفُورًا﴾
(سورة الإسراء: ٦٧)

⁷² Ibn Qayyim, *Madârij as-Sâlikeen*, 196.

«And when adversity touches you at sea, lost are [all] those you invoke except for Him, but when He delivers you to the land, you turn away [from Him]. Ever is man ungrateful.» (Qur'an 17: 67)

﴿وَلَيْنِ أَذَقْنَاهُ رَحْمَةً مِنَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ ضَرَّاءَ مَسَّتْهُ لَيَقُولَنَّ هَذَا لِي وَمَا أَظُنُّ السَّاعَةَ قَائِمَةً وَلَيْنِ رُجِعْتُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي إِنَّ لِي عِنْدَهُ لَلْحُسْنَىٰ...﴾ (سورة فصلت: ٥٠)

«And if We let him taste mercy from Us after an adversity which has touched him, he will surely say: This is [due] to me, and I do not think the Hour will occur; and [even] if I should be returned to my Lord, indeed, for me there will be with Him the best...» (Qur'an 41: 50)

For this reason, Allah continues to test humans so that they will have sufficient opportunities to repent and to return to Allah.

Allah warns us to avoid being among those who call out to Him during times of hardship and trials but then return to disbelief and disobedience once the trial has been removed. He questions why we did not humble ourselves as is required of true servants of Allah:

﴿فَلَوْلَا إِذْ جَاءَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا تَضَرَّعُوا وَلَكِنْ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾
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(سورة الأنعام: ٤٣-٤٤)

«Then why, when Our punishment came to them, did they not humble themselves? But their hearts became hardened, and Satan made attractive to them that which they were doing. So when they forgot that by which they had been reminded [their trial or hardship or warning], We opened to them the doors of every [good] thing until, when they rejoiced in that which they were given, We seized them suddenly, and they were [then] in despair.» (Qur'an 6: 43-44)

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«And if We let him taste mercy from Us after an adversity which has touched him, he will surely say: This is [due] to me, and I do not think the Hour will occur; and [even] if I should be returned to my Lord, indeed, for me there will be with Him the best...» (Qur'an 41: 50)

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﴿وَلَيْنَ أَذَقْنَهُ رَحْمَةً مِنَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ ضَرَاءٍ مَسَّتْهُ لَيَقُولَنَّ هَذَا لِي وَمَا أَظُنُّ السَّاعَةَ قَائِمَةً وَلَيْنَ رُجِعْتُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي إِنَّ لِي عِنْدَهُ لَلْحُسْنَىٰ...﴾ (سورة فصلت: ٥٠)

«And if We let him taste mercy from Us after an adversity which has touched him, he will surely say: This is [due] to me, and I do not think the Hour will occur; and [even] if I should be returned to my Lord, indeed, for me there will be with Him the best...» (Qur'an 41: 50)

﴿وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَعْبُدُ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ حَرْفٍ فَإِنْ أَصَابَهُ خَيْرٌ اطْمَأَنَّ بِهِ وَإِنْ أَصَابَتْهُ فِتْنَةٌ انْقَلَبَ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ خَسِرَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةَ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْخُسْرَانُ الْمُبِينُ ۝١١ يَدْعُوا مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَضُرُّهُ وَمَا لَا نُنْفَعُهُ ۚ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الضَّلَالُ الْبَعِيدُ ۝١٢ يَدْعُوا لَمَن ضَرُّهُ أَقْرَبُ مِن نَّفْعِهِ ۚ لَيْسَ الْمَوْلَىٰ وَلَيْسَ الْعَشِيرُ ۚ﴾ (سورة الحج: ١١-١٣)

«And of the people is he who worships Allah on an edge. If he is touched by good, he is reassured by it; but if he is struck by trial, he turns on his face [to the other direction]. He has lost [this] world and the hereafter. That is what is the manifest loss. He invokes instead of Allah that which neither harms him nor benefits him. That is what is the extreme error. He invokes one whose harm is closer than his benefit — how wretched the protector and how wretched the associate.» (Qur'an 22: 11-13)

In these verses, Allah mentions those who worship Him on an edge; this means on the edge of religion. This worship is characterized by hypocrisy, heedlessness, and uncertainty. It may also refer to those who enter Islam on the edge, remaining if they find what they like but leaving if they are struck by affliction or calamity. In the explanation of this verse, Ibn 'Abbâs states:

People would come to al-Madinah [to declare their Islam] and if their wives gave birth to sons and their mares gave birth to foals, they would say: This is a good religion, but if their wives and their mares did not give birth, they would say: This is a bad religion.⁷³

In the second case, they would become apostates and return to disbelief, blaming the religion for the troubles they faced or the lack of bounties that they had expected to obtain.

⁷³ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 6:533.

Such people then begin to call upon idols or false gods, who can neither harm them nor benefit them in any way; thus they fall into polytheism and disbelief. Allah states that in this world, their false gods are more likely to harm them than to benefit them; in the hereafter, these people will deserve the ultimate harm: eternal punishment in the hellfire.

﴿وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ فَإِذَا أُوذِيَ فِي اللَّهِ جَعَلَ فِتْنَةَ النَّاسِ كَعَذَابِ اللَّهِ وَلَئِن جَاءَ نَصْرٌ مِّن رَّبِّكَ لَيَقُولُنَّ إِنَّا كُنَّا مَعَكُمْ أَوَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِأَعْلَمَ بِمَا فِي صُدُورِ الْعَالَمِينَ ۝١٠﴾ (سورة العنكبوت: ١٠)

«And of the people are some who say: We believe in Allah — but when one [of them] is harmed for [the cause of] Allah, they consider the trial [harm] of the people as [if it were] the punishment of Allah. But if victory comes from your Lord, they say: Indeed, we were with you. Is not Allah most knowing of what is within the breasts of all creatures?» (Qur'an 29: 10)

Methods of Coping

Islam offers a range of methods for coping with the trials and the tribulations of our times. Although the list presented below is fairly comprehensive, it is not meant to be exhaustive. Bear in mind that the specific approach to be taken in any situation may depend upon the type and severity of the trial being experienced.

1. Seeking refuge with and supplicating to Allah

The first and foremost method of coping with, and protecting oneself from, the trials and the tribulations of life is to seek refuge with Allah. It is with Him that we find our safe haven; it is with Him that we find the only One Who is capable of preventing us from falling into trials and tribulations and assisting us when we suffer from them. We may

seek refuge during prayers and at other times, during times of trials and tribulations as well as during times of ease.

To supplicate to Allah means to call out to Him asking for His help and assistance; it exemplifies complete servitude to Allah, the Lord and the Master of the universe. Supplicants demonstrate their complete need for and reliance upon Allah, as well as their lack of ability or power to change the situation themselves.

To increase the likelihood that their supplications will be answered, individuals should meet the conditions for the acceptance of supplications, and they should also try to perform the sunnah (recommended but not obligatory) acts. It is beyond the scope of this book to cover this aspect in detail, but the prescribed actions for supplication include asking Allah alone, asking Allah by His names and attributes, praising Allah and asking Him to praise the Prophet (ﷺ), being persistent, avoiding haste, making ablution, facing the qibla (in the direction of the Kaaba), repeating the supplication three times, seeking forgiveness, not consuming forbidden food or drink, and so forth.⁷⁴

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) would seek refuge with Allah and supplicate to Him during times of difficulty. Believers should become familiar with the supplications that the Prophet (ﷺ) made in times of trials and tribulations. These are excellent words, and supplicating to Allah with them is considered to be an act of worship. There are a variety of them, but we will mention a few for purposes of illustration.

Allah mentions:

﴿وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ ۗ وَنَبِّئِ الصَّابِرِينَ ۖ الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُّصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ﴾

⁷⁴ For a more detailed discussion, see Shaykh Saalih Fawzaan al-Fawzaan, "Manners of Du'aa," Authentic Base, <https://theauthenticbase.wordpress.com/2009/11/12/manners-of-duaa-by-sh-saalih-al-fawzaan/> (accessed March 4, 2013).

﴿أُولَئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ﴾

(سورة البقرة: ١٥٥-١٥٧)

«And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruit, but give good tidings to the patient Who, when disaster strikes them, say: Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return. Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord, and mercy. It is those who are the [rightly] guided.» (Qur'an 2: 155-157)

The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«When a Muslim is struck with an affliction and then says: Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return — and then says: O Allah, reward me for my loss and give me what is better than it — Allah will (listen and) do just that.» (Muslim)

As mentioned in the Qur'an verse and the saying of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), "Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return" is a phrase that is commonly used by those struck by calamity or affliction. It can also be used upon receiving bad news, such as a death. Allah promises that He will replace every loss with something that is better.

In his explanation of this verse from the Qur'an, Ibn Katheer writes:

Those who recite this statement to comfort themselves in the face of their loss, know that they belong to Allah and that He does what He wills with His servants. They also know that nothing and no deed, even if it was the weight of an atom, will be lost with Allah on the Day of Resurrection. These facts thus compel them to admit that they are Allah's servants and that their return will be to Him in the Hereafter.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 1:446.

Ibn 'Abbâs narrated that to find relief in times of distress, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) used to say:

«None has the right to be worshipped but Allah, the Almighty, the Forbearing; none has the right to be worshipped but Allah, Lord of the Mighty Throne; none has the right to be worshipped but Allah, Lord of the heavens and Lord of the earth, Lord of the Mighty Throne.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

It was also narrated by Ibn Abbâs that the Prophet (ﷺ) used to say, in times of distress:

«None has the right to be worshipped but Allah, the Forbearing, the Most Generous; glory is to Allah the Lord of the Mighty Throne; glory is to Allah, the Lord of the seven heavens and the Lord of the Magnificent Throne.» (A sound hadith recorded by Ibn Mâjah)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) also said:

«Shall I not tell you of something that, if any worldly calamity or disaster befalls one of you and he says these words, he will be relieved of it? [It is] the supplication of Prophet Jonah (عليه السلام):

﴿... لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ﴾

(سورة الأنبياء: ٨٧)

«...There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers.» (Qur'an 21: 87)» (Recorded by Ahmad and an-Nasâ'i with a reliable chain of narration)

In an explanation of Prophet Jonah's supplication, Ibn Taymiyah states:

...the situation calls for an acknowledgement that the evil that has afflicted one is because of his sin. Therefore the source of this evil is sin, the immediate objective is to repress the harm, to remove the difficulty, whereas the desire to ask for forgiveness comes secondary to this. However, he [Jonas] did not directly ask for the harm to be removed because he had the overwhelming feeling

within himself that he had committed a sin, oppressed himself, and that he himself was the cause of this harm. Therefore, it befitted his situation that he mention that which would remove the cause of harm, that is, the acknowledgement of his sin. The soul, by its nature, seeks after its immediate needs, in this case the removal of the immediate harm it faces before the removal of any harm it fears may occur in the future.⁷⁶

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«The supplication of the one who is in distress is: O Allah, I hope for Your mercy. Do not abandon me to myself for an instant, and set all my affairs straight. There is none worthy of worship but You.» (A reliable hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said to Asmâ' bint 'Umayy:

«Shall I not teach you phrases that you may say in times of distress? [Say:] He is my Lord; I do not associate any partners with Him.» (A reliable hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

It is through these supplications that one finds solace and peace of mind, even amidst the most severe tribulations, for this draws one closer to Allah. This is a powerful method for overcoming sadness, anxiety and other forms of distress. If the supplication comes from the heart with a sincere intention, it will relieve the supplicant of worry and grief, replacing them with contentment and happiness. The Messenger of Allah said:

«Allah will take away the distress and grief, and replace them with joy, for anyone who is afflicted by distress and grief and says: O Allah, I am Your slave, the son of Your slave, the son of Your maidservant. My forelock is in Your Hand, Your command over me is forever executed, and Your decree over me is just. I ask You by every name belonging to You — which You have named Yourself with, or revealed in Your Book, or taught to any of Your creation, or preserved in the

⁷⁶ Ibn Taymiyah, *The Relief from Distress*, 17.

knowledge of the Unseen with You — that You make the Qur'an the life of my heart and the light of my breast, and a departure for my sorrow and a release for my anxiety.» (A sound hadith recorded by Aḥmad and aṭ-Ṭabarānī)

Supplications may also be used as a form of protection; the supplicant may ask Allah to ward off tribulations before they occur. One may wonder how this is related to the qadr of Allah. Some claim that there is no point in supplication because whatever Allah has decreed will occur, and whatever He has not decreed can never occur.

Belief in the divine decree does not negate the importance and function of supplication. The human being must strive in every way possible for positive outcomes in all situations. Supplication is one means to achieve desired goals, and it in no way contradicts the destiny that has been written. In reality, both the means to achieve a particular goal and the attainment of that goal have already been decreed.⁷⁷ Allah, in His knowledge and wisdom, knows that the human being will supplicate, and thus He responds accordingly. The supplication itself and the protection from (or removal of) trials resulting from that supplication are both part of Allah's divine will and decree. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Nothing repels divine decree except supplication, and nothing increases one's lifespan except good deeds.» (A sound hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

This hadith informs us that the only way to change divine decree is through supplication. For example, a particular misfortune may have been preordained for certain individuals, and this will transpire if they fail to supplicate to Allah to have it averted. If they do supplicate sincerely to Allah, then it may not occur. In this case, the person not only has the evil repelled (through Allah's removal of it) but also earns a reward for the supplication, for it is a form of worship. Allah

⁷⁷ Ibn Qayyim, *Spiritual Disease and its Cure*, 18-20.

may decree that something be granted to His servant (or that an evil be averted) as a result of a supplication; if one abandons supplication, the desired outcome would never be attained.⁷⁸ Ibn Ḥajar states:

And the benefit of performing du'a is the attainment of reward by obeying the command [of Allah to make du'a, and also by the attainment of what is asked for], for there is a possibility that the request is dependent on the du'a since Allah is the Creator of both the causes (or means) and the effects (or results) of them.⁷⁹

There are many supplications in the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that seek Allah's protection from various trials and tribulations. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) taught us to make a specific invocation just before ending our formal prayer. He said:

«After you conclude the testimony of faith, seek refuge with Allah from four things: the punishment of hell, the punishment of the grave, the afflictions of life and death, and the evil affliction of the Dajjâl.» (Muslim)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) used to say:

«O Allah, I seek refuge with You from the fitnah of the fire and the punishment of the fire, the fitnah of the grave and the punishment of the grave, and the evil of the fitnah of wealth and the evil of the fitnah of poverty. O Allah, I seek refuge with You from the evil of the fitnah of the Dajjâl. O Allah, cleanse my heart with snow and hail, cleanse my heart from all sins (just) as a white garment is cleansed from filth, and let there be a long distance between my sins and me (just) as You (have) made the East and the West far away from each other. O Allah, I seek refuge with You from laziness, sins, and being in debt.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

⁷⁸ Ibn Qayyim, *Spiritual Disease and its Cure*, 18-20.

⁷⁹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bâri*, 11/103.

«O Allah, I seek refuge with You from helplessness, laziness, cowardice, old age and miserliness. I seek refuge with You from the punishment of the grave and from the fitnah of life and death.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

The Prophet (ﷺ) often used to say:

«O Allah, I seek refuge with You from distress, grief, incapacity, laziness, miserliness, cowardice, the burden of debt, and being overpowered by men.» (Bukhari)

Abu Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) narrated:

«The Prophet (ﷺ) used to seek refuge with Allah from bad destiny, from being overtaken by wretchedness in the hereafter, from the malicious joy of enemies, and from being destined to an evil end.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Umar narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) supplicated:

«O Allah, I seek refuge with You from Your withdrawal of blessings and protection (from me), from Your sudden wrath, and from every displeasure of Yours.» (A sound hadith recorded by al-Hâkim)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) did not suffer from these experiences, states, or characteristics, yet he frequently sought refuge with Allah to protect him from them.

It is also recommended to recite the last two verses of the second chapter of the Qur'an (Soorat al-Baqarah) each evening before sleeping. They contain an important supplication asking Allah to not burden us with more than we are able to bear, to forgive us, and to have mercy upon us:

﴿... رَبَّنَا لَا تُؤَاخِذْنَا إِنْ نَسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا إَصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْنَا مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ وَاعْفُ عَنَّا وَاعْفِرْ لَنَا وَارْحَمْنَا أَنْتَ مَوْلَانَا فَانصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴾

(سورة البقرة: ٢٨٦)

﴿...Our Lord, do not impose blame on us if we have forgotten or erred. Our Lord, and lay not upon us a burden like that which You laid upon those before us. Our Lord, and burden us not with that which we have no ability to bear. Pardon us, and forgive us, and have mercy upon us. You are our protector, so give us victory over the disbelieving people.﴾

(Qur'an 2: 286)

Of course, the best supplication is to ask Allah to keep one's heart steadfast and firm upon the truth. The supplication of the believers is:

﴿رَبَّنَا لَا تُزِغْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَهَّابُ ﴾

(سورة آل عمران: ٨)

﴿Our Lord, let not our hearts deviate after You have guided us, and grant us from Yourself mercy. Indeed, You are the Bestower.﴾

(Qur'an 3: 8)

An important principle is that if you want Allah to respond to you in times of hardship, you should also supplicate to Him during times of ease. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Whoever wishes that Allah respond to him during hardship and grief should supplicate plentifully when at ease.» (A reliable hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

Allah does not always answer our supplications in the way that we desire. In His infinite and all-encompassing wisdom, He knows what is best for us, and He knows which of our requests will not benefit us. Sufyân at-Thawri states:

Verily, when He withholds, He actually gives, because He did not withhold on account of miserliness or stinginess, but rather He looked at the benefit of His believing servant. So the fact that He withheld is actually His choice [for the servant] and His excellent decision.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Ibn Qayyim, *Madârij as-Sâlikeen*, 2/176.

The main point is that believers should never stop their supplications out of a belief that Allah has not responded or will never respond. They should persevere, think well of Allah, and find comfort in knowing that however He chooses to respond, it is for their ultimate benefit.

2. Performing *ruqyah*

The believers are encouraged to perform *ruqyah*, for this was the practice of the Prophet (ﷺ), his Companions and our righteous predecessors. *Ruqyah* is a type of supplication made for protection or removal of some sickness or harm. It consists of reciting prescribed verses of the Qur'an or supplications from hadiths and then blowing on (with or without saliva) and/or wiping the hands and/or body.⁸¹ These supplications seek aid and refuge from Allah alone.⁸² Protection and healing can occur for illnesses that are physical, psychological (such as depression or anxiety), and/or spiritual (including the evil eye, magic and possession by *jinn* [non-human, rational beings created by Allah from fire]).⁸³

Both the one performing the *ruqyah* and the one being treated must believe that the supplication is only a means and that any cure and healing comes only from Allah. Their hearts must be attached to and dependent upon Allah alone, avoiding all forms of shirk and innovation.⁸⁴ The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Present your *ruqyah* to me. There is no harm in it as long as there is no shirk (in it).» (Muslim)

⁸¹ Various methods may be used, but it is beyond the scope of this book to cover each one.

⁸² Aali Shaikh, *The Rules & Etiquettes of Ruqyah*, 20.

⁸³ Aali Shaikh, *The Rules & Etiquettes of Ruqyah*, 23.

⁸⁴ Aali Shaikh, *The Rules & Etiquettes of Ruqyah*, 51 (Discussion by 'Abdul-'Azeez ibn Bâz).

While the Sharia allows individuals to seek *ruqyah* from others, it is preferable that they perform it on themselves or wait until someone offers to do it for them.⁸⁵

«The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: Seventy thousand from my Ummah will enter paradise without being brought to account.

People asked: Who are they, O Messenger of Allah?

He replied: They are the ones who do not ask others to perform *ruqyah* for them, do not follow omens, and do not use cauterization; they put their trust in their Lord.» (Muslim)

The Messenger (ﷺ) elucidated the characteristics of those who would enter paradise without being brought to account; one category is of those who do not ask others to perform *ruqyah*. The Prophet (ﷺ) recited *ruqyah* for himself as well as for others, but he did not ask anyone to recite *ruqyah* for him.

Refraining from asking others to do *ruqyah* for oneself indicates deep faith and trust in Allah, and reliance upon Him. It also protects the person from falling into the erroneous belief that the cure came from the person performing the *ruqyah* (a belief that is a form of shirk), from unrealistic reliance upon that person, and from excessive admiration and adulation of him or her. Performing *ruqyah* directly upon oneself eliminates any intermediary, thus producing a greater effect.⁸⁶

There are many supplications that the Prophet (ﷺ) used for purposes of *ruqyah*.

«The Prophet (ﷺ) said: Whoever visits a sick person and recites near his head seven times: I ask Allah, the Mighty, Lord of the Mighty Throne to cure you — Allah will definitely cure him from that misfortune as long as it is not his prescribed time (to die).» (A sound hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood and at-Tirmidhi)

⁸⁵ Aali Shaikh, *The Rules & Etiquettes of Ruqyah*, 27.

⁸⁶ Aali Shaikh, *The Rules & Etiquettes of Ruqyah*, 31.

«He also taught that if a person was experiencing pain in his body, he should place his hand upon the afflicted area and say three times: In the name of Allah.

Then he should say seven times: I seek refuge in the glory and power of Allah from the evil that I am experiencing and am wary of.» (Muslim)

The Messenger (ﷺ) would also use the following ruqyah:

«O Allah, Lord of humankind, cure him, for indeed You are the One Who cures, and there is no cure except Your cure — a cure that leaves no disease.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

3. Believing sincerely that Allah will respond

Allah is the only One Who can respond during times of anguish and difficulty. He is the only One Who can remove the trials and the tribulations that we may be experiencing, and He is the only One Who can save us from every distress.

﴿وَإِنْ يَمَسُّكَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ فَلَا كَاشِفَ لَهُ إِلَّا هُوَ وَإِنْ يَمَسُّكَ بِخَيْرٍ فَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ﴾ (سورة الأنعام: ١٧)

«And if Allah should touch you with adversity, there is no remover of it except Him. If He touches you with good, then He is over all things competent.» (Qur'an 6: 17)

﴿قُلْ مَنْ يُنَجِّيكُمْ مِنْ ظُلُمَاتِ الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ تَدْعُونَهُ تَضَرُّعًا وَخُفْيَةً لَئِنْ أَنْجَنَّا مِنْ هَذِهِ لَنُكُونَنَّ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ﴾ قُلْ اللَّهُ يُنَجِّيكُمْ مِنْهَا وَمِنْ كُلِّ كَرْبٍ ثُمَّ أَنْتُمْ تُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾ (سورة الأنعام: ٦٤)

«Say: Who rescues you from the darknesses of the land and sea [when] you call upon Him imploring [aloud] and privately: If He

should save us from this [crisis], we will surely be among the thankful. Say: It is Allah Who saves you from it and from every distress; then you [still] associate others with Him.» (Qur'an 6: 63-64)

Allah promises that He will respond when the supplicant calls upon Him and that He will make a way out of every difficulty. It is up to the one experiencing tribulation to believe in this and to maintain hope in Allah's promise. The true believer will always have a positive attitude and will never despair of Allah's mercy.

﴿وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ...﴾ (سورة غافر: ٦٠)
«And your Lord says: Call upon Me; I will respond to you...» (Qur'an 40: 60)

﴿وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ...﴾ (سورة البقرة: ١٨٦)

«And when My servants ask you [O Muhammad] concerning Me — indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me...» (Qur'an 2: 186)

﴿... وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا ۖ وَيَرْزُقْهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بَلِغُ أَمْرِهِ ۚ قَدْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدْرًا ۝﴾ (سورة الطلاق: ٢-٣)

«...And whoever fears Allah — He will make for him a way out and will provide for him from where he does not expect. Whoever relies upon Allah — then He is sufficient for him. Indeed, Allah will accomplish His purpose. Allah has already set for everything a [decreed] extent.» (Qur'an 65: 2-3)

﴿... وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِ يُسْرًا ۝﴾ ذَلِكَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ أَنْزَلَهُ إِلَيْنَا ۚ وَاللَّهُ يَتَّقِ اللَّهُ يُكْفِرْ عَنْهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِ ۚ وَيُعْظِمَ لَهُ أَجْرًا ۝﴾ (سورة الطلاق: ٤-٥)

«...And whoever fears Allah — He will make for him of his matter ease. That is the command of Allah, which He has sent down to you;

and whoever fears Allah — He will remove for him his misdeeds and make great for him his reward.» (Qur'an 65: 4-5)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Your Lord is Generous and is ashamed to turn away empty the hands of His servant when he raises them to Him.» (A sound hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

«Every night, when there remains the last third of the night, our Lord descends to the lowest heaven and says: Who is supplicating to Me, so that I may respond to him? Who is asking of Me, so that I may grant him? Who is seeking forgiveness, so that I may forgive him?» (Bukhari and Muslim)

The Prophet (ﷺ) said in a hadith qudsi that Allah says:

«O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you, to rise up in one place and make a request of Me, and were I to give everyone what they requested, that would not decrease what I have any more than a needle decreases the sea if dipped into it.» (Muslim)

The Prophet (ﷺ) said that Allah says:

«My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more loved by Me than the religious duties I have imposed upon him, and My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I shall love him. When I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask (something) of Me, I would surely give it to him; were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant him it.» (Bukhari)

In this hadith qudsi, Allah mentions that if someone were to ask of Him, He would surely grant it, and if one were to seek refuge in Him, He would surely provide him with refuge. Allah will fulfil the person's hopes and will respond to the request. Even in the midst of the most difficult of calamities, we should always expect the best

from Allah, relying upon Him and having faith that He will respond. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Let none of you die without expecting good from Allah.» (Muslim and others)

The reason that we should expect good from Allah is that He will fulfil our expectations. If we have positive thoughts about Allah and His mercy, then the outcome will be good. If, on the other hand, we are uncertain about His response or feel that He will not respond, then we will be treated in a way that matches this negative expectation.⁸⁷

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Allah, all Glory and Praise be to Him, has said: I am as My slave thinks (expects) of Me, and I am with him when he remembers Me.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

Ash-Shawkâni states:

In this hadith, Allah encourages His slaves to expect the best from Him, since He will treat them according to their expectations. So whoever expects good from Him, he will be showered with His abundant blessings and will be shown His beautiful generosity... But he who is not like that in his expectations, Allah will not treat him in this manner. And this is the meaning of Allah, Glorified and Exalted be He, being as His slave expects (thinks) of Him. So it is obligatory upon the slave to expect good from Allah in all situations; and he should seek assistance in achieving this by recalling what is mentioned from the evidences [of the Qur'an and Sunnah] that prove the abundance of Allah's Mercy, Glorified and Exalted be He.⁸⁸

We should avoid becoming impatient or harbouring angry thoughts towards Allah due to a perceived lack of response. His response may

⁸⁷ Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, "Three Ways to Forgiveness," Abdurrahman.org, http://abdurrahman.org/others/authentictranslations.com/at_irah_1.pdf (accessed March 4, 2014).

⁸⁸ ash-Shawkâni, *Tuhfat adh-Dhâkireen*, 12.

not come at the time or in the form that we expect, but it will definitely come, for the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Your invocation is granted (by Allah) as long as you do not show impatience by saying: I have invoked Allah, but my request has not been answered.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

We should also avoid asking for anything that is sinful or will lead to severing the ties of kinship. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«When anyone utters a supplication, Allah gives him what he asked, or He prevents evil from him that is equal to it — as long as he does not supplicate for something evil or for the cutting off of the ties of the womb.» (A sound hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

«The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: When a Muslim supplicates to Allah for something that involves no sin or breaking of kinship ties, Allah will give him one of three things: his supplication may be answered immediately, it may be saved for him in the hereafter, or it may turn away an equivalent amount of evil (from him).

The Companions said: In that case, we will ask for more.

He replied: Allah is more (generous).» (A sound hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi and Aḥmad)

This concept of hope during times of calamities is mentioned by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, who states:

The heart in its journey towards Allah, subhanahu wa ta'ala, is like a bird whose head is love, and hope and fear are its wings. When the head and the two wings are sound and healthy the flight of the bird is good, but when the head is cut off, it immediately dies, and when either or both wings are deficient, the bird cannot properly fly and may become victim of any hunter or snare. The righteous predecessors preferred to strengthen the wing of fear during good times when heedlessness is feared, and to strengthen the wing of hope at times of calamity and when near death.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Ibn Qayyim, *Madârij-us-Sâlikeen*, 415.

4. Submitting humbly to, and relying upon, Allah

A basic element of belief in the Oneness of Allah is the understanding that Allah manages all affairs and is able to do all things; He is the Creator, the Sustainer, the Lord and Master of the universe. As such, Allah knows better about every individual's best interests than the individuals themselves do. Understanding this helps people to humbly submit to Allah and to hand their affairs over to Him, relying upon Him for all their needs. Human beings recognize that Allah will take care of the one who trusts Him and has complete confidence in His promise. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Charity does not decrease wealth. If one forgives, Allah increases him in honour; if one humbles himself before Allah, Allah raises him in status.» (Muslim)

Reliance upon Allah means entrusting one's affairs to Him and relying upon Him for the matter at hand as well as all other matters, whether religious or worldly. This is a sign of one's faith in Allah and evidence for one's belief in and implementation of tawḥeed. Relying upon others when only Allah can help is considered to be a form of shirk. The polytheists fall into this when they call upon their various idols (statues, graves, shrines, the deceased, and the like); they entrust their affairs to them and believe that they can grant their requests, repel harm from them, and alleviate their distress and worries.⁹⁰

During times of trauma and difficulty, reliance upon Allah entails employing the means created by Allah that are likely to lead to the desired outcome, as long as they are within the limits of the Sharia. At the same time, one should trust in and depend upon Allah and His mercy, power and ability to do all things. Those who rely upon Allah

⁹⁰ Shaykh Saalih bin Fawzaan Al-Fawzaan, "The Meaning of Reliance (Tawakkul) on Allaah," *Abdurrahman.org*, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/meaningReliance.html> (accessed June 11, 2011).

do not abandon the means to achieve the end, nor do they abandon hope in Allah's mercy and rely upon themselves instead. Disregarding the means contradicts the example of the Prophet (ﷺ); on the other hand, complete reliance upon the means (thinking that they can bring benefit themselves, without the aid of Allah) is a form of shirk. The two — seeking the means and trusting in Allah — must be combined to achieve the most beneficial results, both for this life and for the hereafter.

Relying upon Allah is an act of worship of the heart. It encompasses the understanding that, in reality, there is no helper except Allah. We may consult others, ask for their assistance, and even pay for their services, but in the end, the only true help comes from Allah, and He is the only One who can save us from the predicaments in which we find ourselves. Reliance upon Allah is also connected to belief in His qadr, as we will discuss later.

﴿...فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١٥٩)

﴿...And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who rely [upon Him].﴾ (Qur'an 3: 159)

﴿...وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ﴾ (سورة المائدة: ١١)

﴿...And upon Allah let the believers rely.﴾ (Qur'an 5: 11)

﴿...وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ سُوءًا فَلَا مَرَدَ لَهُ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَالٍ﴾ (سورة الرعد: ١١)

﴿...And when Allah intends for a people ill, there is no repelling it, and there is not for them besides Him any patron.﴾ (Qur'an 13: 11)

﴿...وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بَلِغُ أَمْرِهِ قَدْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ ذَرًّا﴾ (سورة الطلاق: ٣)

﴿...And whoever relies upon Allah — then He is sufficient for him. Indeed, Allah will accomplish His purpose. Allah has already set for everything a [decreed] extent.﴾ (Qur'an 65: 3)

These verses indicate that for the one who relies upon Allah, Allah is sufficient as a helper and a patron. Allah will protect such an individual from harm, since recompense is based upon a person's actions. When believers trust Allah, He rewards them by sufficing them and taking care of their affairs. This is among the greatest fruits and benefits of reliance upon Allah.⁹¹

﴿وَإِنْ يُرِيدُوا أَنْ يَخْدَعُوكَ فَإِنَّ حَسْبَكَ اللَّهُ هُوَ الَّذِي أَيْدَكَ بِبَصِيرَةٍ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾ (سورة الأنفال: ٦٢)

﴿But if they intend to deceive you — then sufficient for you is Allah. It is He who supported you with His help and with the believers.﴾ (Qur'an 8: 62)

Humbly submitting to Allah and relying upon Him provides relief from distress, worries, and regrets, as concern about the needs and interests in this world are lifted. The realization that Allah is the protector and the guardian of all affairs washes away worry and grief, replacing those feelings with peace and contentment.

5. Remembering Allah and reading the Qur'an

The true and patient believers are those who, when struck by a calamity, immediately (and without hesitation) remember Allah and realize that they will be returned to Him. In fact, it becomes an automatic and a natural response. This characteristic of the believers reflects their ongoing connection with their Lord. Their hearts remain alive through this remembrance, while the hearts of the disbelievers are dead. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

⁹¹ Shaykh Saalih bin Fawzaan Al-Fawzaan, "The Meaning of Reliance (Tawakkul) on Allaah," Abdurrahman.org, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/meaningReliance.html> (accessed June 11, 2011).

«The difference between the one who remembers his Lord and the one who does not is like the difference between the living and the dead.» (Bukhari)

Remembrance of Allah takes various forms, including remembering His names and attributes, praising Him, thanking Him, and talking about His blessings. The greatest type of remembrance, of course, is recitation of the Qur'an.

Remembering Allah and reading His noble Book are primary means for coping with trials and tribulations and for achieving peace of the body, mind, and soul. The calming effect that they produce will wash away any psychological or emotional distress and bring a sense of healing. The diseases of the heart (whether they result from desires or doubts) and pain and suffering from other forms of trials can be alleviated through the remembrance of Allah and recitation of the Qur'an.

﴿الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ﴾ (سورة الرعد: ٢٨)

(سورة الرعد: ٢٨)

«Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured.» (Qur'an 13: 28)

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said:

«Allah says: I am just as My slave thinks of Me, and I am with him if he remembers Me. If he remembers Me in himself, I too, remember him in Myself; and if he remembers Me in a group of people, I remember him in a group better than that. If he comes one span nearer to Me, I go one cubit nearer to him; if he comes one cubit nearer to Me, I go a distance of two outstretched arms nearer to him. If he comes to me walking, I go to him running.» (Muslim)

﴿إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَتُهُ

(سورة الأنفال: ٢)

زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ﴾

«The believers are only those who, when Allah is mentioned, their hearts become fearful, and when His verses are recited to them, it increases them in faith; and upon their Lord they rely.»

(Qur'an 8: 2)

﴿يَتَأْتِيَ النَّاسَ قَدْ جَاءَ تَكْمٌ مَوْعِظَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُم وَشِفَاءٌ لِّمَا فِي الصُّدُورِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ

(سورة يونس: ٥٧)

لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

«O humankind, there has come to you instruction from your Lord and healing for what is in the breasts and guidance and mercy for the believers.» (Qur'an 10: 57)

Recitation of the Qur'an provides relief and guidance and helps us to cope by reminding us of the reality of this life (that it is a place of testing); our final abode in the hereafter; the various trials that other believers and prophets experienced, and how Allah supported them; Allah's names and attributes; and His mercy, might and ability to change any situation. The Qur'an also contains supreme and comprehensive legislation to guide humankind to the knowledge of what is right and wrong, moral and immoral. One of the purposes of these laws is to remove hardships from the lives of human beings and to direct them to what is most beneficial.

As such, reading the Qur'an entails more than mere recitation. It also requires contemplation and reflection upon the meanings of the words and the message that Allah has for the reader. Zarabozo writes in this regard:

The reader must have this realization that the Qur'an was revealed for him and his guidance. When he approaches the Qur'an, he should think to himself: In Allah's mercy, He has revealed this book for my benefit. He has revealed it so I may know my Lord and see that path that is pleasing to Him. In reality, Allah is talking directly to me in the Qur'an. He is guiding me directly.⁹²

⁹² Zarabozo, *How to Approach and Understand the Quran*, 168.

He goes on to state:

It is the guidance of Allah for every individual. The reader must realize that this is his personal guide. It is a mercy for him personally. It is a healing for the diseases of his own heart and soul. If the person understands that the Qur'an is a revelation from Allah but does not fathom that it has been revealed for his own guidance, his reading will certainly be lacking. He may never come to the realization that the Qur'an is talking directly to him and to his heart. He may never realize that the Qur'an is showing him the straight path. Alas, he may read the Qur'an throughout his entire life and never realize that this is the guide and a mercy for him until it is too late and it will be of no avail to him.⁹³

This is most certainly true in relation to trials and tribulations; these are the times during which humans are most in need of guidance and comfort.

6. Recalling the purposes and benefits of trials and tribulations

Recalling that Allah has a purpose and a plan in each and every tribulation, as discussed above, leads one to be patient and even grateful to Allah. Remembering that sins will be expiated and rewards will be granted for being patient helps to ease the burden of suffering. The experience will not be in vain, for there are numerous benefits from even the smallest of trials, and the believer hopes to be rewarded by Allah and to earn His good pleasure. (These aspects were discussed in the section: Purposes and Benefits of Trials and Tribulations.) Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said:

⁹³ Zarabozo, *How to Approach and Understand the Quran*, 171.

«Every fatigue, illness, distress, worry, grief, or harm that befalls the Muslim, including the prick of a thorn, is accepted by Allah as expiation for some of his sins.» (Bukhari)

7. Accepting the *qadr* of Allah

As the Master, Controller, and Sustainer of the universe, Allah manages all the affairs of His creatures. He wills and causes events to occur at appropriate times, for precise reasons, with infallible wisdom. When Allah wills something for His slave, whether it is a joyful event or a calamity, no one has the power or ability to block or remove it.

Everything in this life is preordained: our sustenance and provisions; our illnesses, health and well-being; and our trials and tribulations. Believers should accept whatever Allah has predestined for them, whether it seems positive or negative; they should not hate, dislike, or show any discomfort towards events as they unfold in their lives. Allah mentions:

﴿مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرَأَهَا إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ۝ لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَى مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا ءَاتَاكُمْ...﴾
(سورة الحديد: ٢٢-٢٣)

«No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves except that it is in a register before We bring it into being — indeed that, for Allah, is easy — in order that you not despair over what has eluded you and not exult [in pride] over what He has given you...»

(Qur'an 57: 22-23)

﴿مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ يُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ قَلْبَهُ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ۝﴾
(سورة التغابن: ١١)

«No disaster strikes except by permission of Allah. Whoever believes in Allah, He will guide his heart — and Allah is Knowing of all things.» (Qur'an 64: 11)

In the explanation of this particular verse, Ibn Katheer states:

...meaning, whoever suffered an affliction and he knew that it occurred by Allah's judgment and decree, then Allah guides his heart, and will compensate him for his loss in this life by granting guidance to his heart and certainty in faith. Allah will replace whatever he lost for Him with the same or what is better... Therefore, he will know that what reached him would not have missed him and what has missed him would not have reached him.⁹⁴

If only we demonstrate to Allah that we believe in Him and trust His wisdom in relation to the events in our lives, and that we accept His decree, then Allah, out of His love and mercy for us, will bless us with the certainty of faith — and this is the greatest blessing one can obtain in this life. He will guide our hearts to the safe haven of knowing that whatever we experience could never have missed us and whatever we miss could never have reached us.

«On the authority of 'Abdullâh ibn 'Abbâs, who said: One day I was riding behind the Prophet (ﷺ) and he said to me: Young man, I shall teach you some words (of advice). Be mindful of Allah, and Allah will protect you. Be mindful of Allah, and you will find Him in front of you. If you ask, ask Allah. If you seek help, seek help from Allah. Know that if the nations were to gather to benefit you with something, they would not benefit you with anything except what Allah had already recorded for you. If they gathered to harm you with something, they would not be able harm you except with what Allah has already recorded against you. The pens have been lifted, and the pages have dried.» (A reliable sound hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

⁹⁴ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 10:24-25.

True believers understand that whatever has occurred, whether goodness or calamities, ultimately comes from Allah. During times of tribulation, they remember this and increase their reliance upon, trust in and hope in Allah, Who instructs us:

﴿قُلْ لَنْ يُصِيبَنَا إِلَّا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَنَا هُوَ مَوْلَانَا وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ﴾
(سورة التوبة: ٥١)

«Say: Never will we be struck except by what Allah has decreed for us. He is our protector, and upon Allah let the believers rely.»

(Qur'an 9: 51)

What superior medicine for the ills of despair and hopelessness, for the sicknesses of revenge and retribution! Be healed, O soul, by the soothing ointment of the wisdom, the profound insight that you have received in your life exactly what you required, nothing more and nothing less. From the moment of your conception until your last breath of life, Allah has decreed for you what is best.

The believer never says, "If only..." for this phrase indicates doubt in the decree of Allah. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«A strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than a weak believer, although both are good. Pay attention to what benefits you, seek Allah's help, and never feel helpless. If something happens to you, do not say: If only such and such would have happened. Say instead: Allah has decreed it, and He does what He wills. Saying 'if only' opens the way for Satan.» (Muslim)

Comprehending and accepting the decree of Allah leads to bounties and blessings, even in the midst of the most desperate circumstances. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah articulates this reality most eloquently:

Indeed, Allah does not pre-ordain a divine decree for His believing servant except that it is good for him, whether the servant is displeased or pleased with the decree. So, His divine decree for His believing servant of withholding is [in reality] a bounty, even if

«No disaster strikes except by permission of Allah. Whoever believes in Allah, He will guide his heart — and Allah is Knowing of all things.» (Qur'an 64: 11)

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If only we demonstrate to Allah that we believe in Him and trust His wisdom in relation to the events in our lives, and that we accept His decree, then Allah, out of His love and mercy for us, will bless us with the certainty of faith — and this is the greatest blessing one can obtain in this life. He will guide our hearts to the safe haven of knowing that whatever we experience could never have missed us and whatever we miss could never have reached us.

«On the authority of 'Abdullâh ibn 'Abbâs, who said: One day I was riding behind the Prophet (ﷺ) and he said to me: Young man, I shall teach you some words (of advice). Be mindful of Allah, and Allah will protect you. Be mindful of Allah, and you will find Him in front of you. If you ask, ask Allah. If you seek help, seek help from Allah. Know that if the nations were to gather to benefit you with something, they would not benefit you with anything except what Allah had already recorded for you. If they gathered to harm you with something, they would not be able harm you except with what Allah has already recorded against you. The pens have been lifted, and the pages have dried.» (A reliable sound hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

⁹⁴ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 10:24-25.

True believers understand that whatever has occurred, whether goodness or calamities, ultimately comes from Allah. During times of tribulation, they remember this and increase their reliance upon, trust in and hope in Allah, Who instructs us:

﴿قُلْ لَنْ يُصِيبَنَا إِلَّا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَنَا هُوَ مَوْلَانَا وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ﴾ (سورة التوبة: ٥١)

«Say: Never will we be struck except by what Allah has decreed for us. He is our protector, and upon Allah let the believers rely.»

(Qur'an 9: 51)

What superior medicine for the ills of despair and hopelessness, for the sicknesses of revenge and retribution! Be healed, O soul, by the soothing ointment of the wisdom, the profound insight that you have received in your life exactly what you required, nothing more and nothing less. From the moment of your conception until your last breath of life, Allah has decreed for you what is best.

The believer never says, "If only...", for this phrase indicates doubt in the decree of Allah. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«A strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than a weak believer, although both are good. Pay attention to what benefits you, seek Allah's help, and never feel helpless. If something happens to you, do not say: If only such and such would have happened. Say instead: Allah has decreed it, and He does what He wills. Saying 'if only' opens the way for Satan.» (Muslim)

Comprehending and accepting the decree of Allah leads to bounties and blessings, even in the midst of the most desperate circumstances. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah articulates this reality most eloquently:

Indeed, Allah does not pre-ordain a divine decree for His believing servant except that it is good for him, whether the servant is displeased or pleased with the decree. So, His divine decree for His believing servant of withholding is [in reality] a bounty, even if

it is in the form of deprivation, and it is [in reality] a blessing, even if it is in the form of a tribulation, and his affliction is [in reality] well-being, even if it is in the form of a trial. But, due to the ignorance of the servant, and his transgression, he does not consider anything to be a bounty or a blessing or well-being unless he can enjoy it immediately and it is in accordance with his nature. If he were only endowed with a portion of cognizance, he would have considered the withholding as a blessing and the tribulation as a mercy, and he would find pleasure in the affliction more than his enjoyment of well-being, and he would find pleasure in poverty more than his enjoyment of affluence. And he would be more grateful during a state of paucity than in a state of abundance.⁹⁵

8. Realizing that ease follows difficulty

Allah assures us:

(سورة الشرح: ٥-٦)

﴿إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ۖ إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ۖ﴾

«For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease [relief]. Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease.» (Qur'an 94: 5-6)

Allah has promised that with every difficulty, there will be ease. He will make a way out for every circumstance, no matter how utterly impossible it might be seem. The more intense the stress and the crisis, the closer one is likely to be to assistance and relief.

In a different version of the hadith about being mindful of Allah, it is stated:

...Be mindful of Allah, you will find Him in front you. Become beloved to Allah during times of prosperity, He will know you in times of adversity. Know that what has passed you by was never to befall you; and [know that] what has befallen you was never to have passed you by. **And know that victory accompanies**

⁹⁵ Ibn Qayyim, *Madârij as-Sâlikeen*, 2/177.

perseverance, relief accompanies affliction, and ease accompanies hardship.⁹⁶

Coming to this realization provides one with a sense of hope and optimism that is required for coping successfully; these are also characteristics of true believers. When Allah tests individuals by means of disasters and miseries, and the persons remain patient and accepting, the difficulties become easy for them to bear.

9. Adhering to the Qur'an and the Sunnah

Another important method to protect oneself and to cope with trials is by holding firm to the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), according to the understanding of the Companions and the righteous predecessors. We mentioned earlier that the primary causes of trials and tribulations are disobeying Allah and abandoning the Sunnah; hence the only way to rectify these errors and deviations is to return to the pure guidance found in the revelation.

﴿قَالَ أَهْبِطَا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنِ اتَّبَعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا يَضِلُّ وَلَا يَشْقَى ۖ﴾ (سورة طه: ١٢٣)

«[Allah] said: Descend from paradise — all [your descendants] being enemies to one another. If there should come to you guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance will neither go astray [in the world] nor suffer [in the hereafter].» (Qur'an 20: 123)

The Ummah can only be saved from the trials and hardships that have befallen it by clinging to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, because this is the only true guidance that will bring relief. No benefit will be gained by following any other path or any other method. Allah exhorts us:

﴿وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا...﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١٠٣)

⁹⁶ Zarabozo, *Commentary on the Forty Hadith of al-Nawawi*, 730.

«And hold firmly to the rope of Allah [this Qur'an] all together and do not become divided...» (Qur'an 3: 103)

﴿يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَلَا تُبْطِلُوا ءَعْمَلَكُمْ﴾ (٣)

(سورة محمد: ٣٣)

«O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger, and do not invalidate your deeds.» (Qur'an 47: 33)

﴿وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُبِينًا﴾ (٣٦)

(سورة الأحزاب: ٣٦)

«It is not for a believing man or a believing woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decided a matter, that they should [thereafter] have any choice about their affair. Whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has certainly strayed into clear error.» (Qur'an 33: 36)

﴿... وَمَا ءَانَكُمْ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَانِعَكُمْ عَنْهُ فَاَنْتَهُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ﴾ (٧)

(سورة الحشر: ٧)

«...And whatever the Messenger has given you — take; what he has forbidden you — refrain from. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty.» (Qur'an 59: 7)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«I have left among you two matters; if you adhere to them, you will never be misguided: the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet.» (Muslim, al-Bayhaqi, al-Hâkim and Mâlik)

Allah commands:

﴿يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولَى الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ فَإِنْ تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا﴾ (٥٩)

(سورة النساء: ٥٩)

«O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. If you disagree over anything, refer it

to Allah and the Messenger, if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is the best [way] and best in result.» (Qur'an 4: 59)

﴿فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّى يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِي مَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا﴾ (٦٥)

(سورة النساء: ٦٥)

«But no, by your Lord, they will not [truly] believe until they make you [O Muhammad] judge concerning that over which they dispute among themselves and then find within themselves no discomfort from what you have judged and submit in [full, willing] submission.» (Qur'an 4: 65)

There are many verses of the Qur'an and sayings of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) that instruct the believers to obey Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ) and to follow the guidance in His Book and in the Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ).

There are as many as thirty-three verses of the Qur'an, as well as several hadiths, that point to the significance and obligatory nature of obeying the Messenger (ﷺ) and following his Sunnah. In nine verses of the Qur'an, Allah explicitly commands obedience to Himself and also to the Messenger (ﷺ). Many of these verses begin with «O you who have believed...», indicating that the commands are specifically addressed to all those who claim to be believers. Allah commands:

﴿وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ﴾ (١٣٢)

«And obey Allah and obey the Messenger that you may obtain mercy.» (Qur'an 3: 132)

﴿يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَلَا تُبْطِلُوا ءَعْمَلَكُمْ﴾ (٣٣)

(سورة محمد: ٣٣)

«O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger, and do not invalidate your deeds.» (Qur'an 47: 33)

In the Qur'an, Allah never orders obedience to Himself without mentioning obedience to the Messenger (ﷺ), nor does He warn

against disobeying Himself without also warning against disobedience to the Messenger (ﷺ). There are, however, several verses in which Allah orders obedience to the Messenger (ﷺ) without commanding obedience to Himself.⁹⁷

﴿وَمَنْ يُشَاقِقِ الرَّسُولَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا بَيَّنَّ لَهُ الْهُدَىٰ وَيَتَّبِعْ غَيْرَ سَبِيلِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ نُوَلِّهِ مَا تَوَلَّىٰ وَنُصْلِهِ جَهَنَّمَ ۚ وَسَاءَتْ مَصِيرًا﴾ (سورة النساء: ١١٥)

«And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has become clear to him and follows other than the way of the believers — We will give him what he has taken [make him responsible for his choice] and drive him into hell, and evil it is as a destination.» (Qur'an 4: 115)

These verses indicate that there is no real obedience to Allah except through obedience to the Messenger (ﷺ), since the Sunnah is the only means through which one may come to know the correct and complete way to worship Allah.⁹⁸

﴿مَنْ يُطِيعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ ۚ وَمَنْ تَوَلَّىٰ فَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَفِيظًا﴾ (سورة النساء: ٨٠)

«He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah; but those who turn away — We have not sent you over them as a guardian.» (Qur'an 4: 80)

The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Whoever obeys me obeys Allah, and whoever disobeys me disobeys Allah.» (Bukhari)

Adherence to the Qur'an and the Sunnah provides the believers with the correct understanding and criteria by which to evaluate the situations and tribulations facing us. It provides standards and values by which we may judge events in a sound and consistent manner. This is because they direct us to all that is good and warn us against

⁹⁷ Zarabozo, *The Authority and Importance of the Sunnah*, 44-45.

⁹⁸ Zarabozo, *The Authority and Importance of the Sunnah*, 45.

all that is evil. The Qur'an and the Sunnah also help to refute doubts that are stirred up by the various enemies of Islam.

﴿أَفَحُكْمَ الْجَهْلِ يَبْغُونَ ۚ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ اللَّهِ حُكْمًا لِقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ﴾ (سورة المائدة: ٥٠)

«Then is it the judgement of [the time of] ignorance they desire? But who is better than Allah in judgement for a people who are certain [in faith]?» (Qur'an 5: 50)

Shaykh 'Abdul-'Azeez ibn Bâz said, "The only thing that will save you and protect you from fitnah, with the permission of Allah, is judging by the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger (ﷺ)."⁹⁹

10. Developing *taqwâ* (fearful awareness of Allah)

Taqwâ means obedience to Allah, following true guidance and seeking His reward, and refraining from disobeying Allah out of fear of His punishment.¹⁰⁰ It means setting up defences by performing righteous actions to protect oneself from the anger and punishment of Allah and from the hellfire.¹⁰¹ *Taqwâ* is an important protection against fitnah because it erects a barrier between individuals and their following of their desires, reminding them of the hereafter and of the fact that they will be held accountable before Allah.

⁹⁹ Bin Baaz, *The Position of the Mu'min at Times of Fitnah*, 22.

¹⁰⁰ Saleh as-Saleh, "The Contemporary Fitah: Afflictions, Trials, Tests, Tribulations," *Abdurrahman.org*, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/TheContemporaryFitah.pdf> (accessed February 3, 2011).

¹⁰¹ Shaykh Saalih bin Fawzaan Al-Fawzaan, "The Meaning of Reliance (Tawakkul) on Allaah," *Abdurrahman.org*, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/meaningReliance.html> (accessed June 11, 2011).

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلْتَنْظُرْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ لِغَدٍ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾
(سورة الحشر: ١٨)

«O you who have believed, fear Allah. Let every soul look to what it has put forth for tomorrow — and fear Allah. Indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what you do.» (Qur'an 59: 18)

Taqwâ is also a means of obtaining provisions and blessings from Allah, Who tells us:

﴿وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَى ءَامَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ ...﴾
(سورة الأعراف: ٩٦)

«And if only the people of the cities had believed and feared Allah, We would have opened [bestowed] upon them blessings from the heaven and the earth...» (Qur'an 7: 96)

Allah mentions that He is with those who fear Him during times of tribulation and that He is their guardian and protector, promising to aid and support them in this life (and in the hereafter).

﴿... وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الْمُتَّقِينَ﴾
(سورة البقرة: ١٩٤)
«...And fear Allah and know that Allah is with those who fear Him.»
(Qur'an 2: 194)

﴿إِنَّهُمْ لَن يَغْنَوْا عَنْكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَإِنَّ الظَّالِمِينَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ وَاللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الْمُتَّقِينَ﴾
(سورة الجاثية: ١٩)

«Indeed, they will never avail you against Allah at all. And indeed, the wrongdoers are allies of one another; but Allah is the protector of the righteous [those with taqwâ].» (Qur'an 45: 19)

This aspect is critical because the essential purpose of trials and tribulations is to prompt us to develop taqwâ, a component of purification of the soul. Individuals are responsible for change. We cannot blame others; we cannot point the finger at oppressive

regimes or abusive parents or poverty. All of us need to make efforts to rectify the weaknesses within ourselves so that we can submit more completely to Allah and draw closer to Him.

Allah has given us certain imperfections and weaknesses within ourselves as tests and tribulations. At the same time, He has provided us with the means and the capability to resist, strive against, and modify these negative characteristics and traits, and to develop taqwâ in their stead. This reality imparts hope to human beings that it is possible for them to overcome their negative traits and improve themselves.

11. Increasing acts of worship and good deeds

During times of tribulation, the believers should increase acts of worship and perform more good deeds related to the development of taqwâ. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Worshiping during the period of widespread turmoil is like emigrating to me (to where I am).» (Muslim)

During times of difficulty, we often become distracted from and negligent of our obligations to Allah. Only sincere believers pay attention to their duties, perhaps even increasing their recommended acts of worship, at that time. Worship provides a safe haven from the tribulations. Umm Salamah (رضي الله عنها) narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) once woke up, alarmed, and said:

«How perfect Allah is! What has been sent down tonight from the treasures, and what has Allah sent down in terms of trials? Who will wake up the dwellers of the apartments (my wives) so they will pray? Many are they who are dressed in this world but who will be naked in the hereafter.» (Bukhari)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) also said:

«Do good deeds before you encounter afflictions like the night's darkness, during which a man will be a Muslim in the morning and a disbeliever in the evening. Then he becomes a Muslim in the evening and a disbeliever in the morning; he will sell his religion for a worldly offer.» (Muslim)

«Hasten to good deeds before the advent of six: the Dajjâl, the smoke, the beast, the sun rising from the West, widespread vice, and your own greed.» (Muslim)

Trials may be expiated by worship and good deeds. The more good deeds a person does, the more expiation he or she earns. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«A man's fitnah on account of his family, his wealth, himself, his child and his neighbour may be expiated by fasting, prayer, charity, and enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil.» (Muslim)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) also related the following story of three men who were tested by being trapped in a cave by a large boulder that had rolled down from a nearby mountain. The men were in a state of distress and panic, but they soon realized that it was Allah alone who could save them; thus they turned to Him in sincere supplication. Hoping that Allah would rescue them in their time of need and hardship, they brought up some righteous actions that they had performed in the past. Because they had done these good deeds purely for the sake of Allah, Allah opened the way for them.

«Three men were walking when it began to rain, so they sought shelter in a mountain cave. A rock from the mountain fell onto the mouth of the cave, and they were trapped.

They said to one another: See if you have done any righteous deeds for the sake of Allah, and pray to Allah by virtue thereof, so that He might remove the rock for you.

They each went on to relate righteous deeds that they had done, one demonstrating respect and care for his parents, the second avoiding

the temptation of illegal sexual relations, and the third respecting the rights of a man whom he had hired.

As each of them finished detailing his story, he said: If You (Allah) know that I did that seeking Your face, open it for us.

They expressed hope that Allah would accept their good deeds and release them from their difficulty. With each good deed that was related by the trapped men, Allah caused the boulder to move away a little, and the opening to the cave was gradually enlarged until they were finally freed.» (Muslim)

Allah promises those who engage in righteous deeds that they will have goodness in this world and in the hereafter:

﴿وَقِيلَ لِلَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا مَاذَا أَنْزَلَ رَبُّكُمْ قَالُوا خَيْرٌ لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةٌ وَلَدَارُ الْآخِرَةِ خَيْرٌ وَلَنِعْمَ دَارُ الْمُتَّقِينَ﴾ (سورة النحل: ٣٠)

«And it will be said to those who feared Allah: What did your Lord send down? They will say: [That which is] good. For those who do good in this world is good; and the home of the hereafter is better. How excellent is the home of the righteous.» (Qur'an 16: 30)

﴿مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أَنَّىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَوةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾ (سورة النحل: ٩٧)

«Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while a believer — We will surely cause them to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do.» (Qur'an 16: 97)

Good deeds and supererogatory works increase the likelihood of one's supplication being answered. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said that Allah says:

«My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more loved by Me than the religious duties I have imposed upon him, and My

servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I love him. When I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask (something) of Me, I would surely give it to him; and were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant it.» (Bukhari)

If believers become sick or otherwise unable to perform good deeds that they are in the habit of performing, they are rewarded as if they had done them. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«If a servant falls sick or goes on a journey, he (continues to be) rewarded for the good deeds that he used to do when he was healthy or at home.» (Bukhari)

12. Repenting to Allah and seeking forgiveness

From our discussion, we understand that in many cases, trials and tribulations are brought upon us due to our own mistakes and sins. This is part of Allah's plan, the wisdom of which is that through sinning, we are able to repent to Allah and to draw closer to Him. Without sin, this would not be possible; this is why sinning is part of our human nature. Out of His mercy, Allah keeps the doors of repentance open, and He forgives those who repent sincerely and exert efforts to correct themselves and to become better human beings.

﴿قُلْ يَاعِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾ (٥٣) وَأَنِيبُوا إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ وَأَسْلُمُوا لَهُ مِن قَبْلِ أَن يَأْتِيَكُمُ الْعَذَابُ ثُمَّ لَا تُنصَرُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

(سورة الزمر: ٥٣-٥٤)

«Say: O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives

all sins. Indeed, it is He Who is the Forgiving, the Merciful. Return [in repentance] to your Lord and submit to Him before the punishment comes upon you; then you will not be helped.» (Qur'an 39: 53-54)

﴿وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا الذُّنُوبَ بِهِمْ وَمَن يَغْفِرِ الذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَلَمْ يُصِرُّوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلُوا وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ﴾ (١٣٥)

(سورة آل عمران: ١٣٥)

«And those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong themselves [by transgression], remember Allah and seek forgiveness for their sins — and who can forgive sins except Allah? — and [who] do not persist in what they have done while they know.»

(Qur'an 3: 135)

﴿إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَأَصْلَحُوا وَاعْتَصَمُوا بِاللَّهِ وَأَخْلَصُوا دِينَهُمُ لِلَّهِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَعَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ...﴾ (١٤٦)

(سورة النساء: ١٤٦)

«Except for those who repent, correct themselves, hold fast to Allah, and are sincere in their religion for Allah, for those will be with the believers...»

(Qur'an 4: 146)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«My heart is sometimes (overcome) with heedlessness, and I (therefore) seek forgiveness from Allah one hundred times a day.» (A sound hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

Ibn 'Umar (رضي الله عنه) narrated:

«We would sometimes hear the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say one hundred times in one gathering: O Lord, forgive me and (accept) my repentance; You are the One who accepts repentance, the Ever-Merciful.» (A sound hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

«The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: If a servant commits a sin, then performs ablution perfectly, stands and prays two units, and seeks forgiveness from Allah, Allah will forgive him.

servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I love him. When I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask (something) of Me, I would surely give it to him; and were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant it.» (Bukhari)

If believers become sick or otherwise unable to perform good deeds that they are in the habit of performing, they are rewarded as if they had done them. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«If a servant falls sick or goes on a journey, he (continues to be) rewarded for the good deeds that he used to do when he was healthy or at home.» (Bukhari)

12. Repenting to Allah and seeking forgiveness

From our discussion, we understand that in many cases, trials and tribulations are brought upon us due to our own mistakes and sins. This is part of Allah's plan, the wisdom of which is that through sinning, we are able to repent to Allah and to draw closer to Him. Without sin, this would not be possible; this is why sinning is part of our human nature. Out of His mercy, Allah keeps the doors of repentance open, and He forgives those who repent sincerely and exert efforts to correct themselves and to become better human beings.

﴿قُلْ يَبْعَادَى الَّذِينَ اسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِنْ رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾ (٥٢) وَأَنِيبُوا إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ وَأَسْلِمُوا لَهُ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمُ الْعَذَابُ ثُمَّ لَا تُصْرَفُونَ ﴿٥١﴾ (سورة الزمر: ٥٣-٥٤)

«Say: O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives

all sins. Indeed, it is He Who is the Forgiving, the Merciful. Return [in repentance] to your Lord and submit to Him before the punishment comes upon you; then you will not be helped.» (Qur'an 39: 53-54)

﴿وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَجَسَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا الذُّنُوبَ مِنْ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَمْ يُصِرُّوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلُوا وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ﴾ (١٣٥)

(سورة آل عمران: ١٣٥)

«And those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong themselves [by transgression], remember Allah and seek forgiveness for their sins — and who can forgive sins except Allah? — and [who] do not persist in what they have done while they know.»

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﴿إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَأَصْلَحُوا وَاعْتَصَمُوا بِاللَّهِ وَأَخْلَصُوا دِينَهُمْ لِلَّهِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَعَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ...﴾ (١٤٦)

(سورة النساء: ١٤٦)

«Except for those who repent, correct themselves, hold fast to Allah, and are sincere in their religion for Allah, for those will be with the believers...»

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«The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: If a servant commits a sin, then performs ablution perfectly, stands and prays two units, and seeks forgiveness from Allah, Allah will forgive him.

Then he recited this verse:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ...﴾ (١٣٥)

(سورة آل عمران: ١٣٥)

«And those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong themselves [by transgression], remember Allah...» (Qur'an 3: 135)
(A reliable hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

Allah accepts the repentance of those who are sincere and who make an effort to correct themselves and learn from their mistakes. Repentance may also help to ease the burden of the trials that are being experienced. Allah mentions, regarding some Companions who did not participate in jihad:

﴿وَعَلَى الثَّلَاثَةِ الَّذِينَ خَلَفُوا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا ضَاقَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الْأَرْضُ بِمَا رَحُبَتْ وَضَاقَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ أَنْفُسُهُمْ وَظَنُّوا أَن لَا مَلْجَأَ مِنَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ تَابَ عَلَيْهِمْ لِسُوءَاتِهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾ (سورة التوبة: ١١٨)

«And [He also forgave] the three who were left behind [and regretted their error] to the point that the earth closed in on them in spite of its vastness and their souls confined [anguished] them and they were certain that there is no refuge from Allah except in Him. Then He turned to them so they could repent. Indeed, Allah is Accepting of Repentance, the Merciful.» (Qur'an 9: 118)

These Companions were in distress and anguish due to their mistake. They realized that there was no one with whom they could seek refuge or assistance except Allah, Who turned to them and accepted their repentance due to their sincerity and regret. Allah connects this incident to two of His names and attributes, namely 'the Accepting of Repentance' and 'the Merciful'. It is part of Allah's mercy for His creation that He forgives and accepts repentance. If not for that simple fact, we would all be in utter despair and destruction. Prior to Allah's acceptance of their repentance, the earth had seemed

constricted for those Companions, but after Allah accepted their repentance, they were freed from their 'prison,' and the earth once again became expansive for them.

Seeking forgiveness may also serve to avert or delay the punishment of Allah. The polytheists and disbelievers of Makkah challenged Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ).

﴿وَإِذْ قَالُوا اللَّهُمَّ إِن كَانَتْ هَذِهِ حَقًّا مِنْ عِنْدِكَ فَامْطِرْ عَلَيْنَا حِجَارَةً مِنَ السَّمَاءِ أَوْ آتِنَا بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ﴾ (سورة الأنفال: ٣٢)

«And [remember] when they said: O Allah, if this should be the truth from You, then rain down upon us stones from the sky or bring us a painful punishment.» (Qur'an 8: 32)

At the same time, they used to ask forgiveness from Allah. He explains:

﴿وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ وَأَنْتَ فِيهِمْ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ مُعَذِّبَهُمْ وَهُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ﴾ (سورة الأنفال: ٣٣)

«But Allah would not punish them while you [O Muhammad] are among them, and Allah would not punish them while they seek forgiveness.» (Qur'an 8: 33)

Ibn 'Abbâs states in relation to this verse:

They had two safety shelters: the Prophet, and their seeking forgiveness (from Allah). The Prophet went away, and only seeking forgiveness remained.¹⁰²

Thus, their punishment was temporarily averted while the Prophet (ﷺ) was living among them; this was also because they sought forgiveness. Moreover, they were protected due to the believing Muslims who lived among them. Ibn Katheer states:

¹⁰² Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 4:304.

If it was not for the fact that there were some weak Muslims living among the Makkan pagans, those Muslims who invoked Allah for His forgiveness, Allah would have sent down to them the torment that could never be averted. Allah did not do that on account of the weak, ill-treated, and oppressed believers living among them...¹⁰³

There are various supplications for seeking forgiveness. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«The chief of supplications for seeking forgiveness is that the servant says: O Allah, You are my Lord; none deserves worship except You. You created me, and I am Your servant; I am doing all I can to keep to Your covenant and fulfil my promise to You. I take refuge in You from the evil that I have committed. I acknowledge Your favours upon me, and I confess my sins to You, so forgive me; indeed, there is none who can forgive sins save You.

Whoever says this with certainty when he awakes and then dies at night will enter paradise.» (Bukhari)

13. Recalling the temporal nature of this world

It can be beneficial for the one experiencing a tribulation to recall the temporal nature of this world. Although we are prone to be caught up in this worldly life, the reality is that life on this earth is only a passing phase through which we journey on our way to everlasting life in the hereafter. Sometimes life is full of joy and amusement; at other times, it is fraught with toil and struggle. Understanding that any ordeal will one day pass, along with the other aspects of life, can ease the burden. These tests also remind us of the temporal and

¹⁰³ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 4:306.

trivial nature of this life, so that we do not become too attached to it. Allah mentions:

﴿وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَمَتَّعُ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتَهَا وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ﴾
(سورة القصص: ٦٠)

«And whatever thing you [people] have been given — it is [only for] the enjoyment of worldly life and its adornment. What is with Allah is better and more lasting, so will you not use reason?»

(Qur'an 28: 60)

﴿وَمَا هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهُوٌّ وَلَعِبٌ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾
(سورة العنكبوت: ٦٤)

«And this worldly life is not but diversion and amusement. And indeed, the home of the hereafter — that is the [eternal] life, if only they knew.»

(Qur'an 29: 64)

﴿وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَعِبٌ وَلَهُوٌّ وَلِلدَّارِ الْآخِرَةِ خَيْرٌ لِلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ﴾
(سورة الأنعام: ٣٢)

«And the worldly life is not but amusement and diversion; but the home of the hereafter is best for those who fear Allah, so will you not reason?»

(Qur'an 6: 32)

﴿كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَإِنَّمَا تُوَفَّقُونَ أُجُورَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ فَمَنْ زُحِرَ عَنِ النَّارِ وَأُدْخِلَ الْجَنَّةَ فَقَدْ فَازَ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ﴾
(سورة آل عمران: ١٨٥)

«Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your [full] compensation on the Day of Resurrection. So he who is drawn away from the fire and admitted to paradise has attained [his desire]. What is the life of this world except the enjoyment of delusion?»

(Qur'an 3: 185)

When loved ones die, we should remember that they are part of this temporary worldly life and are trusts given to us by Allah; a spouse is a trust, and a child is a trust. Allah tests us through them to determine how well we will take care of them, and then He takes them back at a decreed time. The Prophet (ﷺ) was once consoling his daughter, whose baby was sick, and he said:

«Whatever Allah takes away or gives, (it) belongs to Him, and everything has a fixed term (in this world).» (Bukhari and Muslim)

Allah reminds the believers of the nature of this life in comparison to the hereafter, as He motivates them for jihad:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَا لَكُمْ إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ أَنْفِرُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَنْتُمْ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ أَرْضَيْتُمْ بِالْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا مِنَ الْآخِرَةِ فَمَا مَتَّعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ﴾
(سورة التوبة: ٣٨)

«O you who have believed, what is [the matter] with you that, when you are told to go forth in the cause of Allah, you adhere heavily to the earth? Are you satisfied with the life of this world rather than the hereafter? But what is the enjoyment of worldly life compared to the hereafter except a [very] little?» (Qur'an 9: 38)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«The likeness of this world in comparison to the hereafter is that of one of you dipping his finger into the sea; let him see what he brings forth.» (A sound hadith recorded by Ibn Mâjah)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) informed us that this world is a prison for the believers, who wish to return to their Lord. For the disbelievers, though, it is a paradise; they enjoy all its pleasures without any regard for the limits set by Allah. He said:

«This world is a prison for the believer and a paradise for the disbeliever.» (Muslim)

The Messenger (ﷺ) also instructed us to be in this world as strangers or travellers, so that we do not become too attached to it.

«Abdullâh ibn 'Umar (رضي الله عنه) reported: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) took hold of my shoulder and said: Be in the world like a stranger or a wayfarer.» (Bukhari)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«What is there between myself and the world? This world and I are just like a rider who stops to rest beneath the shade of a tree, then goes and leaves it.» (A reliable hadith recorded by Ibn Mâjah)

When questioned in the hereafter, we will think that we remained in this world for only a day or for a part of a day.

﴿قُلْ كَمْ لَبِثْتُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ عَدَدَ سِنِينَ﴾
﴿قَالُوا لَبِثْنَا يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ فَسْئَلُ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾
﴿قُلْ إِنْ لَبِثْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا لَوْ أَنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ﴾
﴿أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّكُمْ خُلِقْتُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنْكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ﴾
(سورة المؤمنون: ١١٢-١١٥)

«[Allah] will say: How long did you remain on earth in number of years? They will say: We remained a day or part of a day; ask those who enumerate. He will say: You stayed not but a little — if only you had known. Then did you think that We created you uselessly, and that to Us you would not be returned?» (Qur'an 23: 112-115)

14. Remembering death

Death is an inevitable part of our existence. Allah informs us that every human being will taste death at its appointed time:

﴿كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَإِنَّمَا تُوَفَّقُونَ أُجُورَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فَمَنْ زُحْخِحَ عَنِ النَّكَارِ وَأُدْخِلَ الْجَنَّةَ فَقَدْ فَازَ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْفُرُورِ﴾
(سورة آل عمران: ١٨٥)

«Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your [full] compensation on the Day of Resurrection. So he who is drawn away from the fire and admitted to paradise has attained [his desire]. What is the life of this world except the enjoyment of delusion?»

(Qur'an 3: 185)

Allah tells us that the time, place, and manner of death have been decreed for every human.

﴿وَمَا كَانَ لِنَفْسٍ أَنْ تَمُوتَ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ كُنْزًا مُّوَجَّلًا...﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١٤٥)

«And it is not [possible] for one to die except by permission of Allah at a decree determined...»

(Qur'an 3: 145)

﴿مَنْ قَدْ زَانَا لَيْتَكُمْ الْمَوْتُ وَمَا مَحْنُ يَمْسُبُوقِينَ﴾ (سورة الواقعة: ٦٠)

«We have decreed death among you, and We are not to be outdone.»

(Qur'an 56: 60)

The time cannot be brought forward or extended for even one second.

﴿...فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَجْلُهُمْ لَا يَسْتَنْخِرُونَ سَاعَةً وَلَا يَسْتَقْدِمُونَ﴾ (سورة النحل: ٦١)

«...And when their term has come, they will not remain behind an hour, nor will they precede [it].»

(Qur'an 16: 61)

Even if certain individuals attempt to avoid death, it will overtake them wherever they may be, if it has been written for them.

﴿أَيْنَمَا تَكُونُوا يُدْرِكَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ وَلَوْ كُنْتُمْ فِي بُرُوجٍ مُّشِيدَةٍ...﴾ (سورة النساء: ٧٨)

«Wherever you may be, death will overtake you, even if you should be within towers of lofty construction...»

(Qur'an 4: 78)

Knowledge of the timing and details of death are with Allah alone; this is part of the unseen world that is kept hidden from His servants.

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ السَّاعَةِ وَيُنَزِّلُ الْغَيْثَ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْأَرْحَامِ وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ

مَاذَا تَكْسِبُ غَدًا وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ بِأَيِّ أَرْضٍ تَمُوتُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ﴾ (سورة لقمان: ٣٤)

(سورة لقمان: ٣٤)

«Indeed, Allah [alone] has knowledge of the Hour and sends down the rain and knows what is in the wombs. No soul perceives what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul perceives in what land it will die. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.»

(Qur'an 31: 34)

The wisdom of keeping this knowledge hidden from humans is to motivate them to be in a continual state of preparation for death, realizing that it may occur at any moment. They will thus strive to increase righteous deeds and avoid the prohibited at all times. If they knew their time of death, they might be negligent and only turn back and repent to Allah when death was near. 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar (رضي الله عنه) used to say:

If you live until the evening, do not wait for the next day. [Do not hope to live until the next day.] If you wake up in the morning, do not hope to live until the evening. Take [advantage] of your health before your sickness, and take advantage of your life before your death. [In other words, do every possible act of obedience before death comes to you, for no deeds can be performed then.] (Bukhari and at-Tirmidhi)

Once the Prophet (ﷺ) drew a few lines and said:

«This is (man's) hope, and this is the instant of his death; while he is in this state (of hope), the nearer line (death) comes to him.» (Bukhari)

The Prophet (ﷺ) encouraged the believers to remember death on a regular basis, and also to remember the events in the grave, on the Day of Resurrection, and in the hereafter:

«Increase your remembrance of the destroyer of all pleasures (death), for verily, if one remembers it when enduring the hardships of life, it widens it for him. (He no longer feels overburdened with the hardships he is experiencing.) When one remembers it at times of prosperity, it will cause him to feel restricted and burdened. (He will not be too involved with this life and will start to reflect on the serious and heavy matters awaiting him.)» (A sound hadith recorded by an-Nasā'i, at-Tirmidhi, Ibn Mājah, and others)

«Ibn 'Umar said: I was with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) when a man from among the Anṣār came to the Messenger (ﷺ) and greeted him with the greeting of peace.

He then asked: O Messenger of Allah, which of the believers is best?

He replied: He who has the best manners among them.

Then the man asked: Which of the believers is wisest?

He answered: The one who remembers death the most and is best in preparing for it. He is the wisest.» (A reliable hadith recorded by Ibn Mājah)

Contemplating death reminds individuals that they will not remain in this world forever; they will move on to another realm of existence. These thoughts will encourage them to prepare for the Day of Judgement and for the hereafter by performing righteous deeds and avoiding sinful actions. This will prevent them from being deluded and seduced by the temptations and pleasures of this worldly life. As the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) mentioned, once people realize their transitory nature, and the fact that their lives are destined to end soon, they will limit the gratification derived from the delights and the pleasures of this world, because in reality, these are nothing in comparison to the hereafter.

Al-Qurṭubī states, "Know that remembrance of death results in feeling discontent with this temporary life, and in focusing at every moment on the eternal life of the hereafter."¹⁰⁴

In relation to the trials and the tribulations of life, remembering death immediately relieves the burden upon the shoulders of the afflicted. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) stated:

«For verily, if one remembers it when enduring the hardships of life, it widens it for him. (He no longer feels overburdened with

¹⁰⁴ al-Qurṭubī, *at-Tadhkirah* as quoted in al-Ashqar, *The Minor Resurrection*, 113.

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Allah mentions:

﴿وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالشَّرَئِئِ وَبَشِيرِ الْغَيْرِ الْمُبِينِ ۚ﴾ (الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ ﴿١٥٦﴾)

(سورة البقرة: ١٥٥-١٥٦)

«And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruit, but give good tidings to the patient who, when disaster strikes them, say: Indeed, we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.» (Qur'an 2: 155-156)

Imam Ibn Qayyim states in relation to this verse:

This statement is of the most effective and beneficial cure for the afflicted person in his sooner or later life since it comprises two great foundations such that if the slave comes to know them then he will be comforted in his affliction: One is that the slave and his wealth and family truly belong to Allah, most Mighty and Majestic. Allah made them as a loan. So if He takes them from him then it is like the lender taking his possession from the borrower. The second is that the slave will return to Allah, his true Master, and it is inevitable that he will leave this worldly life behind him and come unto Allah alone (without wealth, companions, or anything else) as Allah created him the first time [see verse 6:94]. He will come only with his deeds, the good and the bad. So if this is the beginning and end of the slave, then how could he be pleased for the existence of someone or grieved for a missed one? So his contemplation of his beginning and end is from the greatest cures of this illness.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Saleh as-Saleh, "Testing, Afflictions, and Calamities," Abdurrahman.org, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/TestingAfflictionsandCalamities.pdf> (accessed June 11, 2011).

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It is a general ruling that one should not wish for death, even if the trials and the tribulations facing him or her seem difficult and challenging. One should remain patient, turn to Allah for assistance, and remember the benefits of a longer life (due to an increase in rewards for the believer). Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said:

«None of you should long for death because of a calamity that befell him. If he cannot but long for death, then he should say: O Allah, let me live as long as life is better for me, and take my life if death is better for me.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

«None of you should wish for death or pray for it before it comes to him. When one of you dies, his good deeds come to an end. Surely a longer life is nothing but good for a believer.» (Muslim)

There is an exception to this general ruling, as evidenced by another saying of the Prophet (ﷺ):

«O Allah, I ask You (to guide me to) the doing of good deeds; (I ask You to) forgive me and have mercy on me. If You wish a trial for a people, then take me to You with death, without me being put to trial. O Allah, I ask You (to grant me) Your love, the love of those who love You, and the love of every deed that brings me closer to Your love.» (A sound hadith recorded by Ahmad and at-Tirmidhi)

Ibn Katheer states in relation to this hadith:

These narrations indicate that there will come a very severe and difficult time upon the people, when the Muslims will not have *Jamaa'ah* established upon the truth — this is either for the entire earth or some parts of it.¹⁰⁶

This indicates that we are allowed to wish for death if we fear for our religion and belief due to fitnah that is so severe that the truth is no longer established by the community.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Kathir, *Book of the End*, 41.

15. Focusing on the hereafter

Following on from the previous point, another beneficial coping method is to focus upon the hereafter. In contrast to the transient life of this world, the hereafter is for eternity; this is a concept that is difficult, if not impossible, to entirely fathom. The problems, concerns and worries of this world can be overwhelming, but if the hereafter becomes our main goal and the focus of life, we are more likely to experience contentment and peace of mind. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Whoever is focused only on this world, Allah will confound his affairs and make him fear poverty constantly, and he will not get anything of this world except what has been decreed for him. Whoever is focused on the hereafter, Allah will settle his affairs for him and make him feel content with his lot, and his provision and worldly gains will undoubtedly come to him.» (A sound hadith recorded by Ibn Mâjah)

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companions was their frequent remembrance of the hereafter. Ibn Rajab writes:

Ibn Mas'ood said to his companions, 'You fast and pray more than the Companions of Muhammad (ﷺ) but they were better than you.' They asked, 'How so?' He replied, 'They were more abstinent of this world than you and more desirous of the Hereafter.' Hence he indicated that the superiority of the Companions lay in the attachment of their hearts to the Hereafter, their desire for it, their turning away from this world, and their thinking little of it even if it be readily available to them. Their hearts were empty of the world and filled with the Hereafter. This is what they inherited from their Prophet (ﷺ). He (ﷺ) was one whose heart was most devoid of the world and most attached to Allāh and the Abode of the Hereafter, this despite his outwardly interacting with the

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creation, fulfilling the duties of Prophethood, and implementing the politics of the religion and world.¹⁰⁷

This focus entails the understanding that the hereafter is for eternity, and thus it is something that must be given due attention. There will be no death in the hereafter, and those who enter paradise will never wish to leave it. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«When the people of paradise enter paradise, and the people of the fire enter the fire, death will be brought and placed between the fire and paradise. It will be slaughtered, and a call will be made: O people of paradise, no more death! O people of the fire, no more death!

The people of paradise will have happiness added to their (previous) happiness, and the people of the fire will have sorrow added to their (previous) sorrow.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ كَانَتْ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتُ الْفِرْدَوْسِ نُزُلًا ﴿١٧﴾ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يَبْغُونَ عَنْهَا حَوْلًا ﴿١٨﴾﴾ (سورة الكهف: ١٠٧-١٠٨)

«Indeed, those who have believed and done righteous deeds — they will have the gardens of paradise as a lodging wherein they abide eternally. They will not desire from it any transfer.» (Qur'an 18: 107-108)

In actuality, both the pleasant features and the painful are meant to be reminders of the hereafter. Ibn al-Jawzi states:

Whatever Allaah mentions in the Qur'aan about the delights of the dunyaa, that is for you to look at the delights of this world and contemplate over the delights of the Next Life.

For every example of an enjoyable thing or something the people indulge in, it is a proof against you if you have not reflected over the delights of Paradise.

And every example of a harmful thing in the dunyaa, even if it is something that causes a slight amount of grief, or even something

¹⁰⁷ Ibn Rajab, *The Journey to Allāh*, 47.

as light as a slight fever, verily they are examples that Allaah is using to remind you about the things in the Next Life, the punishment, torture, and deprivation (of the Hellfire).¹⁰⁸

Contentment and determination come from knowing that, in the hereafter, Allah has prepared great rewards for the believer, beyond even the wildest of imaginations. He mentions:

﴿قُلْ أَوْفَيْتُكُمْ بِخَيْرٍ مِنْ ذَلِكَ لِّلَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَأَزْوَاجٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١٥﴾﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١٥)

«Say: Shall I inform you of [something] better than that? For those who fear Allah will be gardens in the presence of their Lord, beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally, and purified spouses and approval from Allah. Allah is Seeing [aware] of [His] servants.» (Qur'an 3: 15)

﴿وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسْكَنٌ طَيِّبٌ فِي جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿٧٢﴾﴾ (سورة التوبة: ٧٢)

«Allah has promised the believing men and believing women gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally, and pleasant dwellings in gardens of perpetual residence; but approval from Allah is greater. It is that which is the great attainment.» (Qur'an 9: 72)

﴿وَإِذَا رَأَيْتُمْ ثَمَرًا رَأَيْتُمْ نَعِيمًا وَمُلْكًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٢٠﴾﴾ (سورة الإنسان: ٢٠)

«And when you look there [in paradise], you will see pleasure and great dominion.» (Qur'an 76: 20)

¹⁰⁸ Quoted from Shaykh Saalih ibn 'Abdil-'Azeez Aalish-Shaykh, "Life is a Fitnah," Bakkah.net, <http://www.bakkah.net/articles/LifeIsAFitnah.htm> (accessed June 11, 2011).

«The Prophet (ﷺ) narrated that Allah says: I have prepared for My righteous slaves what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what has never crossed the mind of any human being.

Then the Prophet (ﷺ) said: Recite, if you wish:

﴿فَلَا تَعْلَمُ نَفْسٌ مَّا أُخْفِيَ لَهُم مِّن قُرَّةِ أَعْيُنٍ جَزَاءً بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾

(سورة السجدة: ١٧)

«And no soul knows what has been hidden for them of comfort for eyes [satisfaction] as a reward for what they used to do.»

(Qur'an 32: 17)» (Bukhari)

The nature of this present life is that it contains afflictions, pain, fatigue and distress. However, life in the hereafter (for the believers) will be very different from the worldly experience. In paradise, there will be no grief or suffering — only a life of eternal bliss and happiness. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Whoever enters paradise is blessed with a life of joy; he will never feel miserable, his clothes will never wear out, and his youth will never fade away.» (Muslim)

«A caller will call out: You are promised that you will be healthy and never get sick, you will live and never die, you will remain young and never grow old, and you will enjoy bliss and never be miserable.» (Muslim)

All the negative emotions that humans experience in this life, such as anger, hatred, envy, and greed, will be removed in the hereafter. This is part of the blessings that Allah will bestow upon the inhabitants of His paradise. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«The first group to enter paradise will be beautiful, with faces as bright as the full moon. They will not spit, blow their noses or excrete. Their vessels will be of gold, their combs of gold and silver, their incense of aloe and their sweat of musk. Each of them will have two wives, the marrow of whose leg-bones will be visible through the flesh because

of their extreme beauty. There will be no differences or hatred among them (the people of paradise); their hearts will be as one, and they will glorify Allah morning and evening.» (Bukhari)

The believers who are admitted to paradise will forget the tribulations as well as the happiness that they experienced in this life. When asked if they ever experienced any misfortune in this worldly life, they will reply that they were never unhappy or in distress. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«One of the people of hell who found the most pleasure in the life of this world will be brought forth on the Day of Resurrection, and he will be dipped into the fire of hell. Then he will be asked: O son of Adam, have you ever seen anything good? Have you ever enjoyed any pleasure?

He will say: No, by Allah, O Lord.

Then a man of the people of paradise, who was the most miserable in this world, will be brought and dipped into paradise once. Then Allah will ask him: O My slave, did you ever experience any misfortune in this worldly life?

The person will reply: No, I never experienced any unhappiness at all.» (Muslim)

Understanding the nature of this life and the hereafter encourages the believers to focus on this most important goal and to try harder to achieve it. The promise of the rewards of paradise serves as an incentive for the believers to be patient with the trials and the tribulations of life and to bear them with dignity and complete reliance upon Allah.

16. Recalling rewards in the hereafter for being patient

In addition to recalling the purposes and benefits of trials and tribulations, one should also recall the rewards in the hereafter that await those who are patient. Patience at the death of one's child, for example, is rewarded by entrance into paradise and protection from the hellfire.

«The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said to some of the women of Anṣâr: Those among you who have had three children die, and who seek reward with Allah, will enter paradise.

One of them asked: And two, O Messenger of Allah?

He replied: And two.» (Muslim)

«Abu Hurayrah narrated that a woman brought her son to the Prophet (ﷺ) and said: O Prophet of Allah, pray to Allah for him, for I have buried three (children).

He asked: You have buried three?

She replied: Yes.

He said: You have safeguarded yourself against the fire with a strong safeguard.» (Muslim)

«It was narrated that Abu Ḥassân said: I said to Abu Hurayrah: Two of my sons have died. Can you narrate to me any hadith from the Messenger of Allah which will console us?

He said: Yes. (The Messenger of Allah said:) Their little ones are the little ones of paradise. When one of them meets his father (or his parents), the child takes hold of his garment (or his hand) as I am taking hold of the hem of your garment, and he does not let go until Allah admits him and his father to paradise.» (Muslim)

17. Focusing on the blessings of Allah

During times of distress, it can be helpful to focus on the numerous blessings that Allah has bestowed upon His servants. In the process, we realize that no distress or tribulation can compare to the bounties that we have received; in fact, the distress and the tribulation appear minuscule in comparison. This leads us to be thankful, even during poverty, sickness, or other states of despair. If this is combined with the understanding that the tribulation has a purpose, it can have a powerful effect on an individual. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: «Look at those who are less fortunate than yourselves, not at those who are better off than yourselves, so that you will not belittle the blessings that Allah has bestowed upon you.» (Muslim)

Comparing ourselves with those who are less fortunate helps us realize that our condition is better than that of others, in terms of good health, provision (food, clothing, shelter, and the like), physical strength and ability. When we consider these blessings, both spiritual and worldly, this may help relieve the worries and distress that we are experiencing. Remembering that Allah has guided even one person to submit in Islam should be sufficient to increase our gratitude to Him.

18. Struggling against Satan

The trials and the tribulations from Satan are a reality in our lives (as was outlined in the section: Types of Trials and Tribulations). We must struggle against him and his workers and be cautious of their deceitful plots and traps. It is an ongoing, difficult battle and one for which the believers must be adequately equipped. The Qur'an and the Sunnah provide several mechanisms by which the believers may protect themselves from the influence of Satan and the evil jinn.

One of the strongest forms of protection is to recite certain passages of the Qur'an, including the last two soorahs (al-Falaq and an-Nâs), verse 255 of Soorat al-Baqarah (known as *âyat ul-kursi*, or 'the verse of the footstool'), and other verses from Soorat al-Baqarah, especially the last two. It is recommended to read the Qur'an and to engage in the remembrance of Allah on a regular basis.

There are also specific supplications that mention seeking refuge with Allah from Satan. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Whoever says, one hundred times a day: *Lâ ilaha illâ Allâhu waḥdahu lâ shareeka lahu, lahul-mulku wa lahul-ḥamdu wa huwa 'alâ kulli shay'in Qadeer* (None has the right to be worshipped but Allah [Alone] Who has no partner; to Him belongs the kingdom [of the universe], and for Him are all the praises, and He has the power to do everything) — will get the same reward as given for freeing ten slaves. One hundred good deeds will be written in his account, and one hundred sins will be deducted from his account; it (saying this) will also be a shield for him from Satan on that day until the night, and no one will be able to do a better deed except the one who does more than this.» (Bukhari)

The believer should seek refuge with Allah whenever Satan whispers or suggests evil, and at other times throughout the day.

﴿وَمَا يَزَعْنِكَ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ نَزَعٌ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ﴾ (سورة فصلت: ٣٦)

(سورة فصلت: ٣٦)

«And if an evil suggestion comes to you from Satan, then seek refuge in Allah. Indeed, He is Hearing and Knowing.»

(Qur'an 41: 36 and 7: 200)

It should be mentioned that individuals are not held responsible for the whisperings that come from Satan (or from their own souls) as long as they do not speak about or act upon them. They should resist the negative and evil thoughts by applying the prescriptions from the

Qur'an and the Sunnah. If they fail to resist the thoughts and instead follow those inclinations, they will be held accountable.

A very important point is that seeking refuge with Allah leads one to have clear understanding and insight; it protects one from falling into error with regard to either doubts or desires.

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا إِذَا مَسَّهُمْ طَائِفٌ مِّنَ الشَّيْطَانِ تَذَكَّرُوا فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْصِرُونَ﴾

(سورة الأعراف: ٢٠١)

«Indeed, those who fear Allah — when an impulse touches them from Satan, they remember [Him], and at once they have insight.»

(Qur'an 7: 201)

This means that when an evil thought or impulse comes to the believers, or when Satan whispers to them to entice them to commit a sin, they remember Allah's punishment, rewards, promises, and threats. They then repent, seeking refuge with Him and asking Him for forgiveness. Thus, they become aware of their errors and see and act appropriately.¹⁰⁹

Allah mentions that the sincere believers will be protected from the workings of Satan:

﴿إِنَّ عِبَادِي لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانٌ وَكَفَىٰ بِرَبِّكَ وَكِيلًا﴾ (سورة الإسراء: ٦٥)

«Indeed, over My [believing] servants there is for you no authority. Sufficient is your Lord as Disposer of affairs.» (Qur'an 17: 65)

﴿فَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ﴾ (سورة البقرة: ١٠١)

﴿الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ﴾ (سورة النحل: ٩٨-١٠٠)

﴿يَتَوَلَّوْنَهُ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِهِ مُشْرِكُونَ﴾ (سورة النحل: ٩٨-١٠٠)

«So when you recite the Qur'an, [first] seek refuge in Allah from Satan, the expelled [from His mercy]. Indeed, there is for him no

¹⁰⁹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 4:244-245.

authority over those who have believed and rely upon their Lord. His authority is only over those who take him as an ally and those who, through him, associate others with Allah. ﴿ (Qur'an 16: 98-100)

19. Leaving anything that is doubtful

When individuals fall into doubtful matters, their minds and souls suffer from a constant state of unrest and discontent, because the innate nature of the mind and the soul cannot accept such confusion and straying from the truth. On the other hand, believers who are on the path of clarity and are free of doubts will find that their hearts are at rest.¹¹⁰ The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«Leave what makes you doubt for what does not make you doubt. Verily, truth is tranquillity, and falsehood is doubt.» (Bukhari, at-Tirmidhi and an-Nasâ'i)

«A man came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and said: My soul says something to me concerning which I would rather be turned to ashes than convey to others.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said: All praise is for Allah, Who rejects the orders of the whisperer.» (A sound hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

Some of the Companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) expressed great concern about intrusive thoughts that they were experiencing. His response indicated that their rejection and repulsion of these thoughts was a sign of true faith.

«They said: We find in our mind great things that we dare not talk about!

He asked them: Does this really occur to you?

They replied: Yes.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said: This is the clear faith.» (Muslim)

¹¹⁰ Zarabozo, *Commentary on the Forty Hadith of al-Nawawi*, 1:566.

The believers have no doubts whatsoever regarding the truth of Allah's revelation — that there is one God, that Muhammad (ﷺ) is His prophet and messenger, that the Qur'an is the final message revealed for all of humankind, and that Islam is the only truthful religion in this world.

﴿إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا وَجَاهَدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ﴾ (سورة الحجرات: ١٥)

«The believers are only the ones who have believed in Allah and His Messenger and then doubt not, but strive with their properties and their lives in the cause of Allah. It is those who are the truthful.»

(Qur'an 49: 15)

Their solid and resolute conviction of the truthfulness of Islam inspires them to sacrifice and exert efforts for the sake of Allah. They complete righteous deeds with passion and sincerity, without fear of anyone other than Allah. This firmness of belief protects the believer from trials and tribulations that come in the form of doubts and suspicion, which are some of the greatest trials of our time. Combined with sound knowledge, their faith enables believers to distinguish truth from falsehood and to defeat the enemies of Islam who attack from this angle.

20. Seeking knowledge

Another means of protecting oneself from fitnah is seeking beneficial Islamic knowledge. Seeking knowledge is imperative, for it protects the individual from the perils of ignorance and provides the correct means to cope with the tribulations of life. The sources for beneficial knowledge should be authentic books of the righteous predecessors, as well as reliable scholars of ahl as-Sunnah who follow the path of the righteous predecessors. Today, when we are already experiencing an information overload and when the paths of deviation are readily

available at our fingertips, we must adhere to knowledge that will benefit us the most and that will direct us to the proper understanding.

There are many verses in the Qur'an and many sayings of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that point to the significance of acquiring knowledge and the effect of this upon the believers.

﴿...إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ...﴾ (سورة فاطر: ٢٨)

﴿...Only those fear Allah, from among His servants, who have knowledge...﴾ (Qur'an 35: 28)

﴿وَبَلَدِكَ الْأَمْثَلُ نَصْرِيهَا لِلنَّاسِ وَمَا يَعْقِلُهَا إِلَّا الْعَالِمُونَ﴾ (سورة العنكبوت: ٤٣)

(سورة العنكبوت: ٤٣)

﴿And these examples We present to the people, but none will understand them except those of knowledge.﴾ (Qur'an 29: 43)

﴿...قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ﴾ (سورة الزمر: ٩)

(سورة الزمر: ٩)

﴿...Say: Are those who know equal to those who do not know? Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding.﴾

(Qur'an 39: 9)

﴿...يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ...﴾ (سورة المجادلة: ١١)

﴿...Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees...﴾ (Qur'an 58: 11)

The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«If Allah wants to do good to a person, He makes him comprehend the religion (understanding of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet [ﷺ]).» (Bukhari)

Shaykh 'Abdul-'Azeez ibn Bâz states:

Therefore, the only thing that will save you and protect you from fitnah, with the permission of Allah, is judging by the Book of

Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger, and that is by returning back to Ahlus-Sunnah and the scholars of the Sunnah, those who have the understanding of the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger, and studied very well, knowing their rulings and adhering to them. [By knowing the way of the early generations of the ummah (the salaf), namely the Sahaabah (may Allah be pleased with them) and those who followed their way].¹¹¹

21. Turning to reliable scholars

We should turn to reliable scholars any time we have questions, but this is particularly true during times of calamity. Through these scholars, we can determine the correct approach for coping with a particular event, and we can gain an understanding of Islamic rulings regarding what is acceptable and what is not. Allah mentions:

﴿وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوْحِي إِلَيْهِمْ فَتَشْلُوكَ أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا

تَعْلَمُونَ﴾ (سورة النحل: ٤٣)

﴿And We sent not before you [O Muhammad] except men to whom We revealed [Our message], so ask the people of the message if you do not know.﴾ (Qur'an 16: 43)

While these verses are referring specifically to the people of knowledge of the former scriptures, scholars have interpreted this to signify praise for people of knowledge in general. The highest knowledge is the Book of Allah, the Qur'an, and the most honourable are those who learn it and teach it to others.

Shaykh 'Abdur-Rahmân ibn Nâsir as-Sa'di explains the aforementioned verses as follows:

¹¹¹ Bin Baaz, *The Position of the Mu'min at Times of Fitnah*, 22.

The general terms of this verse praise the people of knowledge, and express that the esteemed type of knowledge is that of Allah's revealed book; indeed, Allah commanded those who do not know to refer to them in all the incidents. This command consists of the credibility and integrity that Allah vested in the people of knowledge; He has deemed asking them a duty, and consequently, made it a means of relieving the laypeople of responsibility. This also indicates that Allah has entrusted them with His inspiration and His revelation, and they are those who are ordered to purify themselves and to be described with attributes of completeness. The most favoured of the 'people of the message' are the people of this glorious Qur'an, for they are truly the people of the message, and they are more deserving of this title than anyone else. For this reason, Allah mentions:

(سورة النحل: ٤٤)

﴿...وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ ...﴾

﴿...And We revealed to you the message...﴾ (Qur'an 16: 44)

This means the Qur'an in which are reminders of what the servants need in terms of their religion and their worldly life, the manifest and the hidden.¹¹²

Allah tells us:

﴿وَمَا كَانَتِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لِيَنفِرُوا كَافَّةً فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِن كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِّنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِّيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ وَلِيُنذِرُوا قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَحْذَرُونَ﴾

(سورة التوبة: ١٢٢)

﴿And it is not for the believers to go forth [to battle] all at once. For there should separate from every division of them a group [remaining] to obtain understanding in the religion and to warn [advise] their people when they return to them, that they might be cautious.﴾

(Qur'an 9: 122)

¹¹² as-Sa'di, *Tayseer al-Kareem*, 389.

Allah instructs the believers, during times of jihad, to send a group for the military expedition but to leave another group behind to gain knowledge and then instruct their brothers upon their return. Those returning from the battlefield will then find scholars who are qualified to provide legal opinions regarding the lawful and unlawful, and to explain the laws of Allah. If the scholars were sent for jihad and martyred, there would be none, or only a few, remaining to educate the people about the religion and to provide legal rulings.

During times of tribulation and discord, matters become confusing and chaotic for the masses, and reasoning and decision-making are often impaired. People become pre-occupied with issues related to the tribulation and begin to express their own opinions and views, which leads to an increase in the fitnah and to further divisions within the Ummah. This is one reason why questions should be referred only to those who have sound knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, particularly with reference to matters pertaining to the welfare of the public.¹¹³

If people of ignorance are consulted during times of fitnah, and they are encouraged to propagate their misunderstandings, then fitan, disorder, and confusion are likely to increase among the masses. If trustworthy scholars are allowed to clarify matters and to distinguish truth from falsehood, the fitan will decrease or come to an end. The true value of these scholars becomes readily apparent during these times.

As such, in situations of widespread fitan, the general masses are in need of scholars who possess sound and reliable knowledge of the Sharia and its objectives and goals, who understand the state of affairs and the related benefits and harms, and who are able to consider

¹¹³ Shaykh Muhammad al-Hamood, "Fleeing from Fitnah," AbdurRahman.org, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/fleeing-from-fitnah.html> (accessed June 11, 2011).

the possible outcomes. This is only possible for those scholars who have reached a high level of knowledge, comprehension and insight and who are able to communicate that understanding to the people.¹¹⁴ Allah mentions:

﴿وَإِذَا جَاءَهُمْ أَمْرٌ مِنَ الْأَمْنِ أَوِ الْخَوْفِ أَذَاعُوا بِهِ وَلَوْ رَدُّوهُ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ وَإِلَى أُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْهُمْ لَعَلِمَهُ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَنْبِطُونَهُ مِنْهُمْ وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَاتَّبَعْتُمُ الشَّيْطَانَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا﴾
(سورة النساء: ٨٣)

«And when there comes to them information about [public] security or fear, they spread it around. But if they had referred it back to the Messenger or to those of authority among them, then the ones who [can] draw correct conclusions from it would have known about it. And if not for the favour of Allah upon you and His mercy, you would have followed Satan, except for a few.» (Qur'an 4: 83)

Shaykh as-Sa'di explains this verse:

This is a chastisement from Allah to His servants about their inappropriate action [as mentioned in the verse]. When there comes to them some news concerning important matters and public welfare, related to the security and the happiness of the believers or the fear of a calamity befalling them, it is necessary for them to verify the news and not be hasty in spreading it. Rather, they should refer it back to the Messenger (ﷺ) and to those in authority among them: people of good judgement, knowledge, sound advice, discernment and composure, who understand the affairs and recognize the associated benefits and harms. If they perceive in spreading [the news] any benefit and strength to the believers, along with happiness for them and protection from their enemies, then they do so. If they see no benefit, or they see a benefit

¹¹⁴ Shaykh Muhammad al-Hamood, "Fleeing from Fitnah," AbdurRahman.org, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/fleeing-from-fitnah.html> (accessed June 11, 2011).

but the harm exceeds the benefit, they do not spread it. For that [Allah] mentions:

﴿... لَعَلِمَهُ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَنْبِطُونَهُ مِنْهُمْ ...﴾
(سورة النساء: ٨٣)

«...then the ones who [can] draw correct conclusions from it would have known about it...» (Qur'an 4: 83)

This means they can deduce them from their contemplation, their correct understanding, and their discerning cognizance. In this is evidence for an important principle [in proper etiquette] which is: if there arises a need to investigate a particular issue, then it is obligatory to entrust it to those who are qualified for it, and no one should precede them in this — and this is closer to what is correct and safer from error.¹¹⁵

For example, when demonstrations took place in several Muslim countries in 2011, many people gave their 'scholarly' opinions about whether or not demonstrations were acceptable from an Islamic perspective, and they cited various 'proofs' to justify their positions.

But how many of these people are actually qualified to give religious rulings? How many of them have the deep and unadulterated understanding of Islam that allows them to provide answers and solutions as close to the Qur'an and the Sunnah as possible? The answer: very few of the total number. These few are the scholars whom we should seek out in times of difficulty. These are the scholars of ahl as-Sunnah wal-jamâ'ah who comprehend the Qur'an and the Sunnah, so we should not only seek their wisdom, but we should also follow their advice.

Moreover, due to their strong faith, these scholars also serve as a source of strength and fortitude during trials and tribulations.

¹¹⁵ as-Sa'di, *Tayseer al-Kareem*, 148; translation by the author with some words and phrases taken from Shaykh Muhammad al-Hamood, "Fleeing from Fitnah," AbdurRahman.org, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/fleeing-from-fitnah.html> (accessed June 11, 2011).

They are especially needed at times of severe difficulty and struggle. Ibn Qayyim states the following about his teacher and mentor, Ibn Taymiyah, who assisted the Muslims of his time in standing firm in the face of various trials:

When we were seized with fear and our thoughts [about Allah's decree] turned negative, and the earth grew narrow for us, we would go to him. No sooner did we look at him and hear his words than all these [feelings] would leave us, to be replaced by relief, strength, certainty and tranquillity. So glory be to the One who lets His servants witness His Heaven well before they meet Him, who opens its doors to them in this world of deeds and who gives them something of its refreshment, its breeze and its perfume — that they may seek it and hasten towards it with all their strength.¹¹⁶

22. Adhering to the *jamâ'ah* and strengthening the bonds of brotherhood

«Hudhayfah ibn al-Yamân (رضي الله عنه) narrated: People used to ask Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) about good, but I used to ask him about evil, for fear that it might overtake me.

Once I said: O Messenger of Allah, we were in ignorance and evil, and Allah bestowed upon us the present good; will there be any evil after this good?

The Prophet (ﷺ) replied: Yes.

Hudhayfah asked: Will there be any good after that evil?

He answered: Yes, but it will be tainted with a little evil.

¹¹⁶ Ibn Qayyim, *The Invocation of God*, 58.

I asked: What will its little evil be?

He replied: There will be some people who will guide (people) according to principles other than my guidance (my Sunnah). You will see their actions and disapprove of them.

Hudhayfah queried: Will there be any evil after that good?

He stated: Yes, there will be some people who will invite others to the gates of hell, and whoever accepts their invitation will be thrown into it (by them).

Hudhayfah requested: O Messenger of Allah, describe those people to us.

He explained: They will be among us and speak our language. (They will be from among the Arabs.)

Hudhayfah asked: What do you order me to do if such a thing should take place in my life?

He instructed: Adhere to the *jamâ'ah* (the main group) of the Muslims and to their leader.

Hudhayfah asked: What if there is no *jamâ'ah* and no leader?

He answered: Keep away from all the different sects, even if you have to bite (eat) the root of a tree, until you die while you are still in that state.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

Muslims should adhere to the *jamâ'ah*, particularly during times of trials and tribulations. The *jamâ'ah* comprises those who follow the truth and unite upon adherence to the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Allah has commanded the believers to follow the *jamâ'ah* and to unite and cooperate with one another.¹¹⁷ The *jamâ'ah* is distinguished by following a path of moderation, a middle path between extremism and negligence in all matters, whether they are related to beliefs, rulings or behaviour. They refrain from disputation and division, particularly

¹¹⁷ al-Athari, *A Brief Introduction to the Aqidah of Ahl as-Sunnah*, 55.

in religious matters, and give preference to revealed texts over human reasoning.¹¹⁸

The jamâ'ah adheres to the truth and agrees upon matters of 'aqedah:

...by combining knowledge with worship, reliance upon Allah with following the means, engagement in worldly affairs with piety, fear with hope, love (for the believers) with hate (of the disbelievers), mercy and kindness toward the believers with harshness against the *kuffar* [disbelievers]. They do not develop differences regardless of variations in their times and places of living.¹¹⁹

Allah mentions:

﴿وَأَعِصُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا...﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١٠٣)

«And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together, and do not become divided...» (Qur'an 3: 103)

﴿وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ وَأُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١٠٥)

«And do not be like the ones who became divided and differed after the clear proofs had come to them. Those will have a great punishment.» (Qur'an 3: 105)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«(I urge you to adhere to) the jamâ'ah, and beware of division, for Satan is with one and is further away from two. Whoever wants to be in the centre of paradise, let him adhere to the jamâ'ah.» (A sound hadith recorded by Ahmad)¹²⁰

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) warned:

¹¹⁸ al-Athari, *A Brief Introduction to the Aqidah of Ahl as-Sunnah*, 56-57.

¹¹⁹ al-Athari, *A Brief Introduction to the Aqidah of Ahl as-Sunnah*, 57.

¹²⁰ Quoted from al-Athari, *A Brief Introduction to the Aqidah of Ahl as-Sunnah*, 56.

«Those who came before you of the People of the Book split into seventy-two sects, and this Ummah will split into seventy-three sects, seventy-two of which will be in the fire, and one in paradise. That is the jamâ'ah.» (A reliable hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

Another characteristic of the jamâ'ah is that its members love one another, are compassionate towards one another, and cooperate in what is good and beneficial for the community. Muslims should establish and strengthen the bonds of brotherhood among themselves by supporting and assisting one another. These are the bonds of loyalty and friendship based upon the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Righteous brothers, sisters, teachers, and leaders can be a source of guidance, assistance, and steadfastness through their knowledge, wisdom, and commitment to the religion. They will assist us in overcoming various obstacles and challenges that we may face and in reinforcing our resolve and commitment to be patient and do what pleases Allah. The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

«None of you truly believes until he loves for his Muslim brother what he loves for himself.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

«The believers are like a structure, parts of which support other parts.» (Muslim)

«The Muslim is the brother of his fellow Muslim. He does not wrong him or let him suffer. Whoever takes care of his brother's need, Allah will take care of his need; whoever relieves a Muslim of some distress in this world, Allah will relieve him of some distress on the Day of Resurrection; and whoever conceals a Muslim's (faults), Allah will conceal him (meaning his faults) on the Day of Resurrection.» (A sound hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

«The Muslims in their mutual love, kindness, and compassion are like the human body; when one of its parts is in agony, the entire body feels the pain, both in (terms of) sleeplessness and fever.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

This means to avoid hating, harming and envying one another.

«The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: Do not envy one another, do not artificially inflate prices, do not hate one another, do not turn away from one another, and do not undercut one another. O slaves of Allah, be brothers. The Muslim is the brother of his fellow Muslim; he does not wrong him, forsake or despise him. Piety (taqwâ) is here (and he pointed to his chest three times). It is sufficient sin for a man to despise his Muslim brother. A Muslim is unlawful to another Muslim, (along with) his blood, his wealth and his honour.» (Muslim)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Do not hate one another, do not turn away from one another, and do not compete with one another. O slaves of Allah, be brothers.» (Muslim)

In another version:

«Do not cut off ties with one another, do not turn away from one another, and do not envy one another. O slaves of Allah, be brothers, as Allah has commanded you.» (Muslim)

23. Distancing and secluding oneself from *fitnah*

The general ruling is for believers to adhere to the community. During times of extreme *fitnah* and spreading of evil, though, it is recommended to distance oneself from the *fitnah*, even to the point of isolating and secluding oneself from others. Al-Khattâbi states:

Seclusion (*uzlah*) during *fitnah* is the sunnah of the Prophets, the protection of the devoted servants and the path of the wise and elect. I do not know of anyone who discounts it as a valid excuse, especially during this era in which goodness is little and there are many reasons to cry. In Allah alone do we seek refuge from its evil and misfortunes.¹²¹

¹²¹ al-Mutairi, *Religious Extremism*, 535.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«There will be *fitan* (in the near future) during which the sitting person will be better than the standing one, the standing one will be better than the walking one, and the walking one will be better than the running one. Whoever exposes himself to these *fitan* will be destroyed by them. Hence, whoever can find a place of protection or refuge from them should take shelter in it.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

«There will come a time when the best property of a Muslim will be sheep, which he will take to the tops of mountains and the places of rainfall so as to flee with his religion from *fitan*.» (Bukhari)

«Narrated Salamah ibn al-Akwâ' that he visited al-Ḥajjâj [ibn Yoosuf]. Al-Ḥajjâj said: O son of al-Akwâ'! You have turned on your heels [deserted Islam] by staying [in the desert] with the Bedouins.

Salamah replied: No! Allah's Messenger allowed me to stay with the Bedouin in the desert.» (Bukhari)

This hadith is recorded in the collections of Imam Bukhari in the chapter titled, "Staying in the desert with the Bedouins during the period of trials and afflictions". It is mentioned in this chapter that after the murder of 'Uthmân ibn 'Affân, Salamah moved to the desert, where he married, raised his children, and remained until his death.¹²²

«The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: There will be a tribulation in which the one who is lying down will be better than the one who is sitting, the one who is sitting will be better than the one who is standing, the one who is standing will be better than the one who is walking, and the one who is walking will be better than the one who is running.

He (Abu Bakrah) asked: O Messenger of Allah, what do you enjoin me to do?

¹²² Bukhari, *The Book of al-Fitan*, 92.

He replied: Whoever has camels (in the wilderness), let him go and stay with his camels; whoever has sheep, let him go and stay with his sheep; and whoever has land, let him go and stay on his land.

He (Abu Bakrah) queried: What about the one who does not have any of that?

He answered: Let him take his sword and strike its edge on a rock; then let him escape if he can.» (A sound hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Ahead of the Hour will be tribulations like parts of a dark night, in which a man will be a believer in the morning and a disbeliever in the evening, or he will be a believer in the evening and a disbeliever in the morning. The one who is sitting during that (fitnah) will be better than the one who is standing, and the one who is walking during it will be better than the one who is running. Break your bows, cut your bowstrings, and strike your swords on stones. If anyone visits one of you, let him be like the better of the two sons of Adam.» (A sound hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

In another narration of this hadith:

«The Companions asked: What do you enjoin us to do?

He (the Prophet) said: Stay in your houses.» (A reliable hadith recorded by Abu Dâwood)

‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Âṣ narrated:

«The Prophet (ﷺ) intertwined his fingers and said: How will you be, ‘Abdullâh ibn ‘Amr, when you are left with the worst dregs (of humankind)? Their pacts and trusts will be confused and impaired, and they will be like that — and he intertwined his fingers.

He asked: What shall I do, O Messenger of Allah?

The Prophet (ﷺ) replied: Take what you know, and leave that of which you disapprove. Take care of those closest to you, and leave them and their masses.» (Bukhari)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«There will be tribulations, at the gates of which will be callers (calling people) to hell. Dying when you are biting onto the stump of a tree will be better for you than following any of them.» (A sound hadith recorded by Ibn Mâjah)

These hadiths indicate that when evil has spread and fitnah is prevalent, it is permitted for believers to seclude themselves from the people, especially when ordering the good and forbidding the evil has no effect. It is also preferable for them to isolate themselves from people when they fear for their own religious commitment due to the widespread tribulation. This is particularly true during times when mixing with people may lead to apostasy, shirk, deviation from the truth, or abandoning the basic principles and pillars of Islam.

The ruling regarding the permissibility of seclusion will differ depending upon the specifics of place, time, and circumstances. The determination, however, that a particular time and/or set of circumstances warrants seclusion should be made by the people of knowledge (of both Islamic law and contemporary issues) rather than the general masses or laypersons, in order to avoid the development of further evil and fitnah.¹²³

In order for seclusion to be valid and legally sanctioned, several conditions must be met:

1. Seclusion should not prevent the performance of any religious obligations.
2. The reason or cause for seclusion should be legally sanctioned by the people of knowledge (as mentioned above).
3. In situations where secluding oneself is not obligatory (most likely in the majority of cases), it is not acceptable to force others to seclude themselves or to make it obligatory upon them.¹²⁴

¹²³ al-Mutairi, *Religious Extremism*, 540-541.

¹²⁴ al-Mutairi, *Religious Extremism*, 548-551.

It should be noted that even when seclusion is warranted, it may be preferable for some — particularly those who have knowledge and proficiency in speech — to remain among the people in order to exhort, teach, and debate them. In this regard, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«The Muslim who mixes with the people and patiently bears their harm is better than the Muslim who does not mix with the people and patiently bears their harm.» (Recorded by at-Tirmidhi with a reliable chain of narration)

24. Forgiveness or revenge?

In describing the believers, Allah mentions the characteristic of forgiveness, particularly forgiveness during times of anger:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ يَحْتَبُونَ كَيْدَ الْإِنَّمِ وَالْفُجْحِ وَإِذَا مَا غَضِبُوا هُمْ يَغْفِرُونَ﴾

(سورة الشورى: ٣٧)

«And those who avoid the major sins and immoralities, and when they are angry, they forgive.» (Qur'an 42: 37)

﴿الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَالْكُظُمِ الْغَيْظِ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ﴾

(سورة آل عمران: ١٣٤)

«Who spend [in the cause of Allah] during ease and hardship and who restrain anger and who pardon the people — and Allah loves the doers of good.» (Qur'an 3: 134)

(سورة الشورى: ٤٣)

«And whoever is patient and forgives — indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination [on the part of those seeking the reward of Allah].» (Qur'an 42: 43)

﴿...وَأَن تَعْفُوا وَتَصْفَحُوا وَتَغْفِرُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ﴾

(سورة التغابن: ١٤)

«...But if you pardon and overlook and forgive — then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.» (Qur'an 64: 14)

﴿لَا يُحِبُّ اللَّهُ الْجَهْرَ بِالسُّوءِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ إِلَّا مَنْ ظَلَمَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ سَمِيعًا عَلِيمًا﴾

﴿إِنْ تُبْدُوا خَيْرًا أَوْ تُخَفُّوهُ أَوْ تُعْفُوا عَنْ سُوءٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَفُورًا قَدِيرًا﴾

(سورة النساء: ١٤٨-١٤٩)

«Allah does not like the public mention of evil except by one who has been wronged, and ever is Allah Hearing and Knowing. If [instead] you show [some] good or conceal it or pardon an offense — indeed, Allah is ever Pardoning and Competent.» (Qur'an 4: 148-149)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

«Charity does not decrease wealth. If one forgives, Allah increases him in honour, and if one humbles himself before Allah, Allah raises him in status.» (Muslim)

With respect to calling others to Islam, it is encouraged to respond to an evil deed with one that is better (a good deed) and to be patient and forgiving. This type of reply will lead to a diffusion of hostilities, along with reconciliation and opening the hearts of the disbelievers to accept the message of Islam.

﴿وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ قَوْلًا مِّمَّنْ دَعَا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا وَقَالَ إِنَّنِي مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ﴾

﴿وَلَا تَسْتَوِ الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ

عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ﴾

(سورة فصلت: ٣٣-٣٥)

«And who is better in speech than one who invites to Allah and does righteousness and says: Indeed, I am of the Muslims. Not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better;

and thereupon, the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend. But none is granted it except those who are patient, and none is granted it except one having a great portion [of good].» (Qur'an 41: 33-35)

Ibn Abbâs explains this verse as follows:

Allah commands the believers to be patient when they feel angry, to be forbearing when confronted by ignorance, and to forgive, when they are mistreated. If they do this, Allah will save them from the Shaytan [Satan] and subdue their enemies to them until they become like close friends.¹²⁵

Allah also describes the believers as those who defend themselves in response to tyranny and who attempt to prevent further injustice due to their weakness. Revenge is permitted as long as it is conducted in a just and righteous manner and does not exceed the original wrong.

﴿وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَهُمُ الْبَغْيُ هُمْ يَنْصَرُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾ وَجَزَاءُ سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةٌ مِثْلُهَا فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾ وَلَمَنِ انْتَصَرَ بَعْدَ ظُلْمِهِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَا عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ سَبِيلٍ ﴿٤١﴾ إِنَّمَا السَّبِيلُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ يَظْلِمُونَ النَّاسَ وَيَبْعُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٤٢﴾﴾ (سورة الشورى: ٣٩-٤٢)

«And those who, when tyranny strikes them, they defend themselves.¹²⁶ The retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation — his reward is [due] from Allah. Indeed, He does not like wrongdoers. Whoever avenges himself after having been wronged — those have not upon them any cause [for blame]. The cause is only against the ones who wrong the people

¹²⁵ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 8:543.

¹²⁶ They avenge themselves in a just manner, in order to restore their rights and to prevent the aggressors from taking further advantage of them due to their weakness.

and tyrannize upon the earth without right. Those will have a painful punishment.» (Qur'an 42: 39-42)

﴿... وَمَنْ عَاقَبَ بِمِثْلِ مَا عُوقِبَ بِهِ ثُمَّ بُغِيَ عَلَيْهِ لَيَنْصُرْنَاهُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَعَفُوٌّ غَفُورٌ ﴿٦٠﴾﴾ (سورة الحج: ٦٠)

«...And whoever responds [to injustice] with the equivalent of that with which he was harmed and then is tyrannized — Allah will surely aid him. Indeed, Allah is Pardoning and Forgiving.» (Qur'an 22: 60)

This is why the Sharia has prescribed justice in the form of laws of equality in punishment:

﴿وَكُتِبْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ فِيهَا أَنْ النَّفْسَ بِالنَّفْسِ وَالْعَيْنَ بِالْعَيْنِ وَالْأَنْفَ بِالْأَنْفِ وَالْأُذُنَ بِالْأُذُنِ وَالسِّنَّ بِالسِّنِّ وَالْجُرُوحَ قِصَاصٌ فَمَنْ تَصَدَّقَ بِهِ فَهُوَ كَفَّارَةٌ لَهُ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾﴾ (سورة المائدة: ٤٥)

«And We ordained for them therein a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and for wounds a legal retribution. But whoever gives [up his right] as charity, it is an expiation for him. Whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed — then it is those who are the wrongdoers [the unjust].»

(Qur'an 5: 45)

Forgiveness is generally better than retribution (depending upon the particular situation) and carries a great reward in the hereafter.

﴿... فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ ... ﴿٤٠﴾﴾ (سورة الشورى: ٤٠)

«...but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation — his reward is [due] from Allah...» (Qur'an 42: 40)

﴿وَلَمَنْ صَبَرَ وَغَفَرَ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ لَمِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُمُورِ ﴿٤٣﴾﴾ (سورة الشورى: ٤٣)

«And whoever is patient and forgives — indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination.» (Qur'an 42: 43)

It is one of the things enjoined by Allah for which there will be great reward and praise.¹²⁷ The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: «Allah only increases the honour of the person who forgives.» (Muslim)

During the time of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), an incident concerning his Companion, Abu Bakr as-Şiddeeq, became the reason for a revelation from Allah. Abu Bakr (رضي الله عنه) was known for his generosity, particularly toward his relatives. One of his relatives, Miṣṭah ibn Uthāthah, was not able to earn a living, so Abu Bakr routinely provided him with funds.

On one occasion, the hypocrites, led by their chief ‘Abdullāh ibn Ubayy, spread rumours imputing the honour of Abu Bakr’s daughter ‘Ā’ishah (who was the wife of the Prophet [ﷺ]). The hypocrites sided with their chief, and even some of the sincere Muslims, including Miṣṭah ibn Uthāthah, believed the rumours about ‘Ā’ishah. ‘Ā’ishah was absolved of wrongdoing after her innocence was disclosed through Qur’anic revelation.¹²⁸

Abu Bakr was understandably upset about the position that Miṣṭah had taken regarding his daughter ‘Ā’ishah, particularly given the importance attached to family honour in Arab society at that time. He swore by Allah that he would never provide financial assistance to Miṣṭah again, but then Allah revealed the following verse:¹²⁹

﴿وَلَا يَأْتِلْ أُولُو الْفَضْلِ مِنْكُمْ وَالسَّعَةِ أَنْ يُؤْتُوا أُولَى الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْمُهَاجِرِينَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلْيَعْفُوا وَلْيَصْفَحُوا أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ﴾
(سورة النور: ٢٢)

«And let not those of virtue among you and wealth swear not to give [aid] to their relatives and the needy and the emigrants for the cause

¹²⁷ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 8:603.

¹²⁸ al-Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar*.

¹²⁹ Sallābi, *Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq: His Life and Times*, 172-173.

of Allah, and let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like for Allah to forgive you? Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.»

(Qur’an 24: 22)

Upon hearing this verse, Abu Bakr said, “Indeed, by Allah, I would love for Allah to forgive me.” He forgave Miṣṭah and continued to provide for him as he had previously done. Abu Bakr realized the significance of this verse — that if he forgave others in this life, Allah would forgive him in the hereafter.¹³⁰ This contains an important lesson for all human beings. In relation to forgiveness, Ibn Ḥibbān states:

It is necessary that the intelligent accustom his soul to forgiving people and to leave repaying evil with evil. This is because there is nothing that would silence an evil better than good treatment and beneficence and there is nothing that would stir up evil more than repaying evil with evil... Whoever desires copious reward, to receive devout love and good mention, let him experience the bitterness of opposing his base desires and taking to the way we have highlighted: joining relations when they have been severed; giving in the face of prevention; *hilm* (forbearance) in the face of ignorance; and forgiveness in the face of oppression. These are the greatest morals and manners of the religious.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Sallābi, *Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq: His Life and Times*, 173.

¹³¹ Bin ‘Abdi-s-Salaam, *Trials and Tribulations: Wisdom and Benefits*, 12.

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF THE PROPHETS AND THE MESSENGERS, AND HOW THEY COPE WITH THEM

In the lives and the stories of prophets and messengers, one finds many lessons and reminders; this explains why these stories have been preserved to be read by generation after generation. Astute readers, and those of understanding, will attempt to garner the wisdom and benefits of these stories and apply this knowledge in their lives. Allah mentions:

﴿لَقَدْ كُنَّا فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةً لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ مَا كَانَ حَدِيثًا يُفْتَرَى وَلَكِنْ تَصْدِيقَ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ﴾
(سورة يوسف: ١١١)

«There was certainly in their [the prophets' and the messengers'] stories a lesson for those of understanding. Never was the Qur'an a narration invented, but [it is] a confirmation of what was before it, a detailed explanation of all things, and guidance and mercy for a people who believe.»
(Qur'an 12: 111)

Upon perusing these stories, it becomes readily evident that all of the prophets and messengers experienced various trials and tribulations during their lifetimes. In fact, they faced more severe and difficult trials than did other human beings. This is commensurate with the understanding that the most righteous will be tested to a greater extent. Often they were tested through their people's rejection of their message and even through attempts to harm and kill them. Allah mentions:

﴿وَلَقَدْ كَذَّبْتَ رَسُولٌ مِّن قَبْلِكَ فَصَبَرُوا عَلَىٰ مَا كُذِّبُوا وَأُوذُوا حَتَّىٰ أَنَّهُمْ نَصَرْنَا وَلَا مِبْدَلَ لِكَلِمَاتِ اللَّهِ وَلَقَدْ جَاءَكَ مِنْ نَّبَايَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ﴾
(سورة الأنعام: ٣٤)

«And certainly were messengers denied before you, but they were patient over [the effect of] denial, and they were harmed until Our victory came to them. None can alter the words [decrees] of Allah. There has certainly come to you some information about the [previous] messengers.»
(Qur'an 6: 34)

The following discussion presents a selection of trials and tribulations faced by some of the prophets and messengers. It will not be possible to cover all the stories in detail, but several have been selected for purposes of illustration and benefit.

Stories from the life of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)

During his lifetime, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) suffered severe trials and tribulations — more than any other human being, in fact, because he was the best of humankind. He was persecuted for his faith; exiled from his land; injured during jihad; and called a madman, magician, and soothsayer. All of his children died during his lifetime, except for the daughter who died six months after his death. Disbelievers attempted to harm and kill him on several occasions. He also suffered severely during physical illness, more than other humans, and he said: «When I fall ill, my pain is equivalent to the pain of two men among you.» (Bukhari)

We mentioned earlier the verse regarding the tribulation suffered by the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and his Companions:

﴿أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَن تَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِكُم مَّثَلُ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِن قَبْلِكُمْ مَّسَّتْهُمُ الْبَأْسَاءُ وَالضَّرَاءُ وَزُلْزِلُوا حَتَّىٰ يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مَعَهُ مَتَىٰ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ ۚ أَلَا إِنَّا نَصْرُ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ﴾
(سورة البقرة: ٢١٤)

«Or do you think that you will enter paradise while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you? They were touched with poverty and hardship and were shaken until [even their] Messenger and those who believed with him said: When is the help of Allah? Unquestionably, the help of Allah is near.»

(Qur'an 2: 214)

It is understood that this verse was revealed in relation to the hardships undergone by the Messenger (ﷺ) and the Companions during the early days of Islam. In addition to the torture and persecution imposed on Muslims by the leaders of Makkah, a boycott was imposed upon Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and his tribe, whose members were protecting him. This boycott prohibited social relations, marriage, business relations, and any other form of verbal or physical contact with them until they gave up the Prophet (ﷺ), who would then be executed. The proclamation was set in writing and hung in the Kaaba.¹³²

The Prophet (ﷺ), some of his family members, and his Companions moved to the outskirts of Makkah and remained there for three years. During this time, they suffered great hardship, including severe hunger that forced them to eat animal skins and leaves from the trees. The cries of children suffering from hungry were often heard.¹³³ They were shaken, out of fear of the enemy and due to the tremendous trial with which they were tested:

﴿... مَسَّتْهُمُ الْبَأْسَاءُ وَالضَّرَاءُ وَزُلْزِلُوا حَتَّىٰ يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مَعَهُ مَتَىٰ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ ...﴾
(سورة البقرة: ٢١٤)

«...They were touched by poverty and hardship and were shaken until [even their] messenger and those who believed with him said: When is the help of Allah...?»
(Qur'an 2: 214)

The response to their question was:

¹³² al-Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar*, 117.

¹³³ al-Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar*, 117-118.

(سورة البقرة: ٢١٤)

﴿...أَلَا إِنَّ نَصْرَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ﴾

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It is narrated that Khabbâb ibn al-Araṭṭ said:

We said: O Messenger of Allah! Why do you not invoke Allah to support us? Why do you not supplicate to Allah for us? He said: The saw would be placed on the middle of the head of one of those who were before you (believers) and he would be sawn until his feet, and he would be combed with iron combs between his skin and bones, yet that would not make him change his religion. He then said: By Allah! This matter (religion) will spread (or expand) by Allah until the traveller leaves San'a' to Hadramawt (both in Yemen, but a great distance from each other) fearing only Allah and then the wolf for the sake of his sheep. You are just a hasty people.¹³⁴

In another story, the Prophet (ﷺ) exemplified the true meaning of complete reliance upon Allah:

«It was narrated that Jâbir ibn 'Abdullâh said: We went out with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) on a campaign towards Najd. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) caught up with us in a valley where thorny trees abounded. He stopped beneath a tree and hung his sword on one of its branches. The people scattered throughout the valley, seeking shade beneath the trees.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: A man came to me while I was sleeping and took the sword. I woke up to find him standing over my head, and by the time I realized (that he was there), the sword was unsheathed in his hand.

He asked me: Who will protect you against me?

I answered: Allah.

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¹³⁴ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 1:592-593.

Then he sheathed the sword, and he is sitting over there.

Then the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) left him alone.» (Muslim)

The story of Prophet Job (ﷺ)

The story of Prophet Job offers many valuable lessons in dealing with the trials and tribulations of life.

﴿وَيُؤْتِيكَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَسَّنِيَ الضُّرُّ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ﴾ (٨٣) فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ، فَكَشَفْنَا مَا بِهِ مِنْ ضُرٍّ، وَآتَيْنَاهُ أَهْلَهُ وَمِثْلَهُمْ مَعَهُمْ رَحْمَةً مِنَّا عِنْدَنَا وَذِكْرًا لِلْعَالَمِينَ﴾ (٨٤)

«And [mention] Job, when he called to his Lord: Indeed, adversity has touched me, and You are the Most Merciful of the merciful. So We responded to him and removed what afflicted him of adversity. We gave him [back] his family and the like thereof with them as mercy from Us and a reminder for the worshippers [of Allah].»

(Qur'an 21: 83-84)

﴿وَأَذْكُرْ عَبْدَنَا أَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَسَّنِيَ الشَّيْطَانُ بِنُصْبٍ وَعَذَابٍ﴾ (٤١) أَرْكُضْ بِرِجْلِكَ هَذَا غُغْغَلٌ بَارِدٌ وَشَرَابٌ﴾ (٤٢) وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ أَهْلَهُ وَمِثْلَهُمْ مَعَهُمْ رَحْمَةً مِنَّا وَذِكْرًا لِأُولَى الْأَلْبَابِ﴾ (٤٣) وَخَذْ بِيَدِكَ ضَغْنًا فَاضْرِبْ بِهِ، وَلَا تَحْنُثْ، إِنَّا وَجَدْنَاهُ صَابِرًا نِعَمَ الْعَبْدِ إِنَّهُ أَوَّابٌ﴾ (٤٤)

(سورة ص: ٤١-٤٤)

«And remember our servant Job, when he called to his Lord: Indeed, Satan has touched me with hardship and torment. [He was told]: Strike [the ground] with your foot; this is a [spring for a] cool bath and drink. We granted him his family and a like [number] with them as mercy from Us and a reminder for those of understanding. [We said:] And take in your hand a bunch [of grass] and strike with it, and do not break your oath. Indeed, We found him patient, an excellent servant. Indeed, he was one repeatedly turning back [to Allah].»

(Qur'an 38: 41-44)

(سورة البقرة: ٢١٤)

﴿...أَلَا إِنَّ نَصْرَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ﴾

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(Qur'an 38: 41-44)

It has been noted by the scholars of the Qur'an and the historians that Job (ﷺ) was, at one time, a wealthy man who owned large amounts of property, as well as livestock, cattle, sheep, crops, and servants. He had a wife and many children. Then, due to the will of Allah that Job be tested, everything was taken away from him. Physically, he was afflicted with various types of diseases to such an extent that the only healthy parts remaining in his body were his heart and his tongue (with which he remembered Allah). He lost all his wealth and even his children. Eventually, due to his illnesses, his friends and family members deserted him, and he was expelled from the city. Everyone left him except for his pious and faithful wife, who continued to fulfil her duties as a wife and take care of him.¹³⁵

At one point, after the trial had continued for a long period of time,¹³⁶ Job's wife said, "Job, if you pray to your Lord, He will free you from this suffering."

He answered, "I have lived for seventy years as a healthy person. Can I not be patient for Allah for another seventy years?"¹³⁷

Prophet Job (ﷺ) was patient, and he called out to his Lord:

﴿... أَنِّي مَسْنِيَ الضُّرَّ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ﴾ (سورة الأنبياء: ٨٣)

﴿...Indeed, adversity has touched me, and You are the Most Merciful of the merciful.﴾ (Qur'an 21: 83)

The level of patience that Job displayed is mentioned in *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*:

When Allah tested Ayyub [Job], upon him be peace, with the loss of his family, wealth and children, and he had nothing left, he

¹³⁵ Ibn Katheer, *Stories of the Prophets*, 320-321.

¹³⁶ There is a difference of opinion regarding the length of time for which Job suffered these trials. Some scholars said three years, others said seven years and a few months, and still others stated eighteen years. See Ibn Katheer, *Stories of the Prophets*, 321.

¹³⁷ Ibn Katheer, *Stories of the Prophets*, 322.

started to focus upon the remembrance of Allah, and he said: I praise You, the Lord of lords, Who bestowed His kindness upon me and gave me wealth and children, and there was no corner of my heart that was not filled with attachment to these worldly things, then You took all of that away from me and You emptied my heart, and there is nothing to stand between me and You. If my enemy Iblees knew of this, he would be jealous of me. When Iblees heard of this, he became upset. And Ayyub, upon him be peace, said: O Lord, You gave me wealth and children, and there was no one standing at my door complaining of some wrong I had done to him. You know that. I used to have a bed prepared for me, but I forsook it and said to myself: You were not created to lie on a comfortable bed. I only forsook that for Your sake.¹³⁸

Prophet Job supplicated to Allah, and Allah answered his supplication:

﴿فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ، فَكَشَفْنَا مَا بِهِ مِنْ ضُرٍّ، وَآتَيْنَاهُ أَهْلَهُ وَمِثْلَهُمْ مَعَهُمْ رَحْمَةً مِنْ عِنْدِنَا وَذِكْرًا لِلْعَابِدِينَ﴾ (سورة الأنبياء: ٨٤)

﴿So We responded to him and removed what afflicted him of adversity. We gave him [back] his family and the like thereof with them as a mercy from Us and a reminder for the worshippers [of Allah].﴾ (Qur'an 21: 84)

Allah turned to Prophet Job (ﷺ) with His mercy and commanded him to strike the earth with his foot. He did as he was instructed, and water from the spring gushed forth. He was then instructed to bathe in it.

﴿أَرْكَضْ بِرِجْلِكَ هَذَا مُغْتَسِلٌ بَارِدٌ وَشَرَابٌ﴾ (سورة ص: ٤٢)

﴿[So he was told]: Strike [the ground] with your foot; this is a [spring for a] cool bath and drink.﴾ (Qur'an 38: 42)

Prophet Job (ﷺ) took a bath with the water and was cured from his disease, pain, and suffering. He was then restored to prosperity,

¹³⁸ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 6:478-479.

and acquired wealth, a home, and children again. Some scholars have interpreted the verse ﴿...And We gave him [back] his family and the like thereof with them as a mercy from Us...﴾ to mean that Allah brought his children back to life. This was the view of Ibn 'Abbâs, who said, "They themselves were restored to him." This was also the opinion of several other scholars.¹³⁹ Others stated that Allah gave him another family in place of those who had died.¹⁴⁰ The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) described something that happened after Allah had healed Job:

«While Job was naked, taking a bath, a swarm of gold locusts fell on him, so he started collecting them in his garment.

His Lord called to him: Job, have I not given you enough that you are not in need of them?

He said: Yes, O Lord! But I cannot dispense with your blessings.» (Bukhari)

﴿...As a mercy from Us﴾ means that Allah removed his hardships and replaced what he had lost with much more than he originally possessed, due to His immense mercy and grace and in response to Job's patience, steadfastness, humility and repentance. Allah praises Prophet Job (ﷺ) for these characteristics:

﴿...إِنَّا وَجَدْنَاهُ صَابِرًا نَعْمَ الْعَبْدُ إِنَّهُ أَوَّابٌ﴾ (سورة ص: ٤٤)

﴿...Indeed, We found him patient, an excellent servant. Indeed, he was one repeatedly turning back [to Allah].﴾ (Qur'an 38: 44)

Prophet Job (ﷺ) knelt and prayed to express his deep and sincere gratitude to Allah for His mercy, blessings, and bounties.

In two of the verses relating to Prophet Job (ﷺ), Allah specifies that the purpose for the revelation of this story is to serve as:

﴿...وَذِكْرَىٰ لِلْعَالَمِينَ﴾ (سورة الأنبياء: ٨٤)

¹³⁹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 6:479.

¹⁴⁰ Ibn Katheer, *Stories of the Prophets*, 324.

﴿...a reminder for the worshippers [of Allah].﴾ (Qur'an 21: 84)

﴿...وَذِكْرَىٰ لِأُولَى الْأَلْبَابِ﴾ (سورة ص: ٤٣)

﴿...a reminder for those of understanding.﴾ (Qur'an 38: 43)

His story is a lesson for those who may face trials and difficulties in life (which means every single human being), particularly with regard to their physical health, wealth, and family. Prophet Job (ﷺ) was tested by Allah far beyond what others had ever been, or would ever be, afflicted with. In spite of that, he was patient, relied upon Allah, and had hope that Allah would cure him from his physical illness and remove the suffering and tribulation.¹⁴¹ The other lesson, perhaps not so apparent, is that we should be grateful to Allah for the blessings that He has bestowed upon us, and we should utilize those blessings in the most beneficial ways and in His service.

The story of Prophet Jonah (ﷺ)

The story of Prophet Jonah is mentioned in at least four places in the Qur'an. The scholars of Qur'anic exegesis state that Allah sent Jonah (ﷺ) as a prophet to the people of Nineveh in a land called Mosul (northern Iraq). Jonah preached Islam and called on his people to worship Allah alone, but they refused to accept his message and became even more resolute in their disbelief.¹⁴²

After attempting to persuade them over a long period of time, Jonah (ﷺ) became impatient and angry, and he left the city. Before leaving, he warned his people that a punishment would befall them after three days. It is said that when they realized that the punishment was actually going to occur (after seeing its signs), they regretted their disbelief and mistreatment of their prophet, and they cried to Allah in repentance, pleading for His assistance. Due to His mercy

¹⁴¹ Ibn Katheer, *Stories of the Prophets*, 325.

¹⁴² Ibn Katheer, *Stories of the Prophets*, 340.

and kindness, Allah removed the punishment from them. This was the only time in the history of humankind that an entire city had believed, and it was the only time that a city benefited by repenting and believing after seeing its punishment.¹⁴³

﴿فَلَوْلَا كَانَتْ قَرْيَةٌ ءَامَنَتْ فَنَفَعَهَا إِيمَانُهَا إِلَّا قَوْمَ يُونُسَ لَمَّا ءَامَنُوا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُمْ
عَذَابَ الْخِزْيِ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَمَتَّعْنَاهُمْ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ﴿٩٨﴾﴾ (سورة يونس: ٩٨)

«Then has there not been a [single] city that believed so its faith benefited it, except the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in the worldly life and gave them enjoyment for a time.» (Qur'an 10: 98)

Angry and frustrated, Jonah left his people and boarded a ship. Soon after the ship set sail, a storm emerged; the ship began to be tossed around on the sea by the huge waves, to such an extent (according to some scholars) that it was on the verge of sinking. The passengers decided to cast lots to determine who would be thrown overboard in order to lighten the load, and Jonah lost the draw. People refused to throw him overboard, though, because they knew Jonah and were aware of his reputation. They repeated the draw a second and third time, but his name was drawn each time. It had already been decreed by Allah that Jonah would be the loser, for He had a plan for him. Thus, he was thrown (or he cast himself) into the sea.¹⁴⁴

﴿وَإِنَّ يُونُسَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٣٩﴾ إِذْ أَبَقَ إِلَى الْفُلِ الْمَشْحُونِ ﴿١٤٠﴾ فَسَاهَمَ فَكَانَ مِنَ
الْمُخْضِرِينَ ﴿١٤١﴾ فَالْتَقَمَهُ الْحُوتُ وَهُوَ مُلِيمٌ ﴿١٤٢﴾﴾ (سورة الصافات: ١٣٩-١٤٢)

«And indeed, Jonah was among the messengers. [Mention] when he ran away to the laden ship. He drew lots and was among the losers. Then the fish swallowed him, while he was blameworthy.»

(Qur'an 37: 139-142)

¹⁴³ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 4:660.

¹⁴⁴ Ibn Katheer, *Stories of the Prophets*, 341-342.

Jonah was blameworthy because he prematurely gave up hope of his people submitting to Allah, and he left them without Allah's permission. After entering the sea, Allah sent a large whale to swallow him, commanding the whale to avoid eating his flesh or bones, for he was not intended to be its food. When Jonah settled in the belly of the whale and realized that he was still alive, he began to glorify Allah.¹⁴⁵

﴿وَذَا النُّونِ إِذْ ذَهَبَ مُغْضِبًا فَظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ نَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ فَنَادَىٰ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾ فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ وَبَجَّيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْغَمِّ وَكَذَلِكَ نُفَصِّلُ الْآمِنِينَ ﴿٨٨﴾﴾ (سورة الأنبياء: ٨٧-٨٨)

«And [mention] the man of the fish [Jonah], when he went off in anger and thought that We would not decree [anything] upon him.¹⁴⁶ He called out within the darknesses: There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers. So We responded to him and saved him from the distress, and thus do We save the believers.» (Qur'an 21: 87-88)

The darknesses referred to in this verse include the darkness inside the belly of the whale, the darkness of the sea, and the darkness of the night. Some scholars state that this whale was swallowed by another larger whale, in which case there would have been an additional layer of darkness.¹⁴⁷ The depth of the darkness, as indicated by the physical analogies in this verse, symbolizes the intensity of the trials and the tribulations that human beings are subjected to. Jonah (ﷺ) faced one of the severest trials that any human could experience. In the enclosed belly of a whale in the depths of the sea at night, what other response could there be but to call out to the Creator and Master of the Universe? Who, other than Allah, the All-Powerful and All-Wise, would be able to rescue someone in such a state?

¹⁴⁵ Ibn Katheer, *Stories of the Prophets*, 342-343.

¹⁴⁶ Meaning: would not restrict him in the belly of the fish.

¹⁴⁷ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 6:483; Ibn Katheer, *Stories of the Prophets*, 343.

In his supplication, Jonah acknowledged that there is no power or god worthy of worship except Allah, thus recognizing that there is none other to whom he could turn for assistance or forgiveness. Jonah (ﷺ) then declared that Allah is far above all shortcomings and therefore could not be blamed for the situation that he found himself in. Allah does not oppress or wrong anyone, not even to the slightest degree. Finally, Jonah admitted that he had made a mistake, and this admission is the most important element of seeking forgiveness. The words were not only spoken, but they came from the depths of his heart.

Due to his sincerity, Allah accepted his plea and answered his call by delivering him from his dire circumstances and distress. This is His promise and response for the believers. Had Jonah (ﷺ) not glorified Allah and not returned to Him in repentance, he would have remained in the belly of the whale until the Day of Resurrection.¹⁴⁸

﴿فَلَوْلَا أَنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُسَبِّحِينَ ﴿١٤٣﴾ لَلَبَثَ فِي بَطْنِهِ إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ ﴿١٤٤﴾ فَبَدَّلْنَاهُ بِالْعَرَاءِ وَهُوَ سَقِيمٌ ﴿١٤٥﴾ وَأَنْبَتْنَا عَلَيْهِ شَجَرَةً مِنْ يَقْطِينٍ ﴿١٤٦﴾﴾

(سورة الصافات: ١٤٦)

﴿And had he not been of those who exalt Allah, he would have remained inside its belly until the day they are resurrected. But We threw him onto the open shore while he was ill, and We caused to grow over him a gourd vine.﴾ (Qur'an 37: 143-146)

It has been stated that the gourd vine refers to squash, which has a number of benefits: it grows quickly, the leaves are large and smooth and provide shade from the sun, flies do not come near it, it provides nourishment, and even the skin and seeds may be eaten.¹⁴⁹ Allah not only saved Jonah (ﷺ) from his distress, but He also blessed him with relief in the form of healthy and cooling food. As mentioned earlier, He also blessed him by guiding his people to the truth.

¹⁴⁸ Meaning that the belly of the fish would have been his grave.

¹⁴⁹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 8:289.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) instructed the believers to call upon Allah, particularly during times of distress, with the words of Prophet Jonah (ﷺ). He said:

«The supplication of Prophet Jonah when he supplicated, while in the belly of the whale, was: *Lâ ilâha illâ anta Subhânaka inni kuntu minadh-Dhâlimeen*. (There is none worthy of worship except You, Glory to You. Indeed, I have been of the transgressors.)

Indeed, Allah responds to every Muslim who supplicates with it for anything.» (A sound hadith recorded by at-Tirmidhi)

It is interesting to note that after the people of Jonah had lost their prophet and were afraid that Allah's punishment would befall them, they sincerely repented to Allah. Due to their regret, sincerity and truthful repentance, Allah removed the punishment from them. This event provides further evidence for the fact that sincere faith and sincere repentance to Allah can lead to the removal of punishment. Allah informs us:

﴿فَلَوْلَا كَانَتْ قَرْيَةٌ ءَامَنَتْ فَنَفَعَهَا إِيمَانُهَا إِلَّا قَوْمَ يُونُسَ لَمَّا ءَامَنُوا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُمْ عَذَابَ الْخِزْيِ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَمَتَّعْنَاهُمْ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ﴿٩٨﴾﴾ (سورة يونس: ٩٨)

﴿Then there has not been a [single] city that believed so its faith benefited it, except the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in worldly life and gave them enjoyment [provision] for a time.﴾ (Qur'an 10: 98)

The story of Prophet Jacob (ﷺ)

Another example of the trials and the tribulations experienced by the prophets is the famous story of Prophet Joseph, his younger brother, Benjamin, and their father Jacob. The details of this story are provided in a chapter of the Qur'an entitled 'Joseph'.

As a young lad, Joseph was left in a well by his jealous older brothers. A caravan discovered him, and he was taken to Egypt. Prophet Jacob was deeply saddened by the loss of his son Joseph; years later, Benjamin was also taken away from him temporarily. Allah describes Jacob's reaction:

﴿وَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا سَفَى عَلَى يَوْسُفَ وَأَبْضَتَ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزَنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ﴾

(سورة يوسف: ٨٤)

﴿And he turned away from them [the older brothers who related the story] and said: O, my sorrow over Joseph — and his eyes became white [he lost his sight] from grief, for he was [of that] a suppressor.﴾

(Qur'an 12: 84)

When Prophet Jacob lost his son Benjamin, he was reminded of the loss of his other son (Joseph) years before. The recent event and the associated sadness re-awakened the grief that he had suppressed within himself for so many years; he was overcome by grief to the extent that he lost his eyesight. He did not express the extent of his grief or anger, though, nor did he complain to another created being. Instead he remained patient and relied upon Allah for assistance.

﴿قَالُوا تَاللَّهِ تَقْتُلُوا تَذْكُرُ يَوْسُفَ حَتَّى تَكُونَ حَرَضًا أَوْ تَكُونَ مِنَ الْهَالِكِينَ﴾ (٨٥) ﴿قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَشْكُوا بَنِي وَحْزَنِي إِلَى اللَّهِ وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾ (٨٦) ﴿يَبْنِي أَذْهَبُوا فَتَحَسَّسُوا مِنْ يَوْسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ وَلَا تَأْيِسُوا مِنْ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا يَأْيِسُ مِنْ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْكَافِرُونَ﴾ (٨٧) (سورة يوسف: ٨٥-٨٧)

﴿They [his sons] said: By Allah, you will not cease remembering Joseph until you become fatally ill or become of those who perish. Jacob replied to them: I only complain of my suffering and my grief to Allah, and I know from Allah that which you do not know. O my sons, go and find out about Joseph and his brother, and despair not of relief from Allah. Indeed, no one despairs of relief from Allah except the disbelieving people.﴾

(Qur'an 12: 85-87)

This last statement of Prophet Jacob (ﷺ) is a profound one. He instructed his sons to never give up hope in the mercy of Allah, nor lose trust in Him, for what they desired or wished to accomplish would transpire. He then informed them that only disbelievers despair of Allah's grace and mercy, due to their lack of knowledge and their incomplete, inaccurate understanding of the nature of Allah and His connection to His creatures. This is a fundamental distinction made in the Qur'an between the believers and the disbelievers. A primary characteristic of true believers is that they never despair or give up hope.

Lessons from the stories of the prophets and the messengers

The stories of the prophets and the messengers are meant to be lessons for all of humankind as well as a source of inspiration for those with insight. In the examples presented above, Allah responded to the supplications of His servants and relieved the pain, suffering, fear, and worry that accompanied their tribulations. One could also look at the stories of Abraham (ﷺ) when he was thrown into the fire; Moses (ﷺ), who was pursued by Pharaoh and his troops; Jesus (ﷺ), whom the Jews attempted to murder; and Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) when he and Abu Bakr were in the cave of Thawr, hiding from the people of Quraysh.

In each of these incidents — and there are many more that could be recounted — Allah came to the assistance of His distressed servants. This is a manifestation of His mercy, love and care for His allies and friends, those to whom He has promised special favour and protection. This protection and assistance is reserved specifically for those who are worthy of it.

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The prophets and their followers provide prime examples of patience, steadfastness, reliance upon Allah, and turning to Allah during times of difficulty. It is for these reasons that they deserved to receive the assistance of Allah, and with Allah is the greatest help and the best of rewards.

﴿وَكَايْنٍ مِّن نَّبِيٍّ قَاتَلَ مَعَهُ رِبِّيُّونَ كَثِيرٌ فَمَا وَهَنُوا لِمَا أَصَابَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَمَا ضَعُفُوا وَمَا اسْتَكَانُوا ۗ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٤٦﴾ وَمَا كَانَ قَوْلُهُمْ إِلَّا أَن قَالُوا رَبَّنَا اغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَإِسْرَافَنَا فِي أَمْرِنَا وَثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَنَا وَانصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿١٤٧﴾ فَآتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ ثَوَابَ الدُّنْيَا وَحُسْنَ ثَوَابِ الْآخِرَةِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٤٨﴾﴾

(سورة آل عمران: ١٤٦-١٤٨)

«And how many a prophet [fought and] with him fought many religious scholars. But they never lost assurance due to what afflicted them in the cause of Allah, nor did they weaken or submit. Allah loves the steadfast. And their words were not but that they said: Our Lord, forgive us our sins and the excess [committed] in our affairs, plant firmly our feet, and give us victory over the disbelieving people. So Allah gave them the reward of this world and the good reward of the hereafter. Allah loves the doers of good.» (Qur'an 3: 146-148)

The prophets and the messengers (peace and blessings be upon all of them) were aware of the power and the benefits of relying upon Allah against the enemies of Islam at all times. Due to their reliance and trust in Allah, they did not fear anyone other than Him; thus they proceeded to call others to Islam with fortitude and determination. Some of them even participated in jihad along with the believers, with complete courage and strength, knowing that Allah was with them every step of the way. As a result, all the hardships and challenges that they faced were diminished in their eyes, and they did not ask for respite.

With regard to Prophet Hood (عليه السلام), Allah states:

﴿... قَالَ إِنِّي أَشْهَدُ اللَّهَ وَأَشْهَدُوكُمْ أَنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِّمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾ مِّن دُونِهِ فَكِدُونِي جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ لَا تُنظِرُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾ إِنِّي تَوَكَّلْتُ عَلَى اللَّهِ رَبِّي وَرَبِّكُمْ مَا مِن دَابَّةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ آخِذٌ بِنَاصِيَتِهَا ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٥٦﴾﴾

(سورة هود: ٥٤-٥٦)

«...He said: I call Allah to witness, and witness [yourselves] that I am free from whatever you associate with Allah other than Him. So plot against me all together; then do not give me respite. Indeed, I have relied upon Allah, my Lord and your Lord. There is no creature but that He holds its forelock [controls it]. Indeed, my Lord is on a path [that is] straight.» (Qur'an 11: 54-56)

About Prophet Noah, Allah mentions:

﴿وَأَتْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ نُوحٍ إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ يَتَقَوْمِ إِن كَانَ كَبُرَ عَلَيْكُمْ مَقَامِي وَتَذِكْرِي بِتَايِبٍ ۖ وَاللَّهُ فَعَلَى اللَّهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ فَأَجْمِعُوا أَمْرَكُمْ وَشُرَكَاءَكُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَكُنْ أَمْرُكُمْ عَلَيْكُمْ غُمَّةً ثُمَّ اقْضُوا إِلَيَّ وَلَا تُنظِرُونِ ﴿٧١﴾﴾

(سورة يونس: ٧١)

«And recite to them the news of Noah, when he said to his people: O my people, if my residence and my reminding of the signs of Allah has become burdensome upon you — then I have relied upon Allah. So resolve upon your plan and [call upon] your associates. Let not your plan be obscure to you; carry it out upon me and do not give me respite.» (Qur'an 10: 71)

About Abraham, Allah states:

﴿قَدْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ إِذْ قَالُوا لِقَوْمِهِمْ إِنَّا بُرَءُوكُمْ مِنْكُمْ وَمِمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ كَفَرْنَا بِكُمْ وَبَدَا بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةُ وَالْبَغْضَاءُ أَبَدًا حَتَّى تُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَحَدُّهُ... رَبَّنَا عَلَيْكَ تَوَكَّلْنَا وَإِلَيْكَ أَنَبْنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٤﴾ رَبَّنَا لَا تَجْعَلْنَا فِتْنَةً لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَاعْفِرْ لَنَا رَبَّنَا ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٥﴾﴾

(سورة الممتحنة: ٤-٥)

«There has already been for you an excellent pattern in Abraham and those with him, when they said to their people: Indeed, we are disassociated from you and from whatever you worship other than

Allah. We have denied you, and there has appeared between us and you animosity and hatred forever until you believe in Allah alone... Our Lord, upon You we have relied, and to You we have returned, and to You is the destination. Our Lord, make us not [objects of] torment for the disbelievers, and forgive us, our Lord. Indeed, it is You who is the Exalted in Might, the Wise. ﴿Qur'an 60: 4-5﴾

Allah instructs Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in relation to the polytheists:

﴿... قُلْ أَدْعُوا شُرَكَاءَكُمْ ثُمَّ كِيدُونِ فَلَا تُنْظَرُونَ﴾ (١٩٥) ﴿إِنَّ وَلِيََّ اللَّهَ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْكِتَابَ وَهُوَ يَتَوَلَّى الصَّالِحِينَ﴾ (١٩٦) ﴿وَالَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ نَصْرَكُمْ وَلَا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَنْصُرُونَ﴾ (١٩٧) (سورة الأعراف: ١٩٥-١٩٧)

﴿...Say [O Muhammad]: Call your partners and then conspire against me and give me no respite. Indeed, my protector is Allah, who has sent down the Book; He is an ally to the righteous. Those you call upon besides Him are unable to help you, nor can they help themselves.﴾

(Qur'an 7: 195-197)

In fact, all the prophets and messengers demonstrated complete trust and reliance upon Allah, as the following verses illustrate:

﴿أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ نَبُؤُا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ وَعَادٍ وَثَمُودَ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ لَا يَعْلَمُهُمْ إِلَّا اللَّهُ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَرَدُّوا أَيْدِيَهُمْ فِي أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَقَالُوا إِنَّا كَفَرْنَا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ وَإِنَّا لَفِي شَكٍّ مِمَّا تَدْعُونَنَا إِلَيْهِ مُرِيبٍ﴾ (١) ﴿قَالَتْ رُسُلُهُمْ أَفِي اللَّهِ شَكٌّ فَاطِرِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ يَدْعُوكُمْ لِيَغْفِرَ لَكُمْ مِنْ ذُنُوبِكُمْ وَيُخْرِجَكُمْ إِلَى أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى قَالُوا إِنَّ أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِثْلُنَا تُرِيدُونَ أَنْ تَصُدُّونَا عَمَّا كَانَتْ يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُنَا فَأَتُونَا بِسُلْطَانٍ مُبِينٍ﴾ (٢) ﴿قَالَتْ لَهُمْ رُسُلُهُمْ إِنْ نَحْنُ إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِثْلُكُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَمُنُّ عَلَى مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَمَا كَانَ لَنَا أَنْ نَأْتِيَكُمْ بِسُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ

الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١١﴾ وَمَا لَنَا أَلَّا نَتَوَكَّلَ عَلَى اللَّهِ وَقَدْ هَدَانَا سُبُلَنَا وَلَنْصِيرَكَ عَلَى مَا أَذَيْتُمُونَا وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُتَوَكِّلُونَ ﴿١٢﴾ (سورة إبراهيم: ٩-١٢)

﴿Has there not reached you the news of those before you — the people of Noah and 'Âd and Thamood and those after them? No one knows them [their number] but Allah. Their messengers brought them clear proofs, but they returned their hands to their mouths and said: Indeed, we disbelieve in that with which you have been sent, and indeed we are, about that to which you invite us, in disquieting doubt. Their messengers said: Can there be doubt about Allah, Creator of the heavens and earth? He invites you that He may forgive your sins, and He delays your death for a specified term. They said: You are not but men like us who wish to avert us from what our fathers were worshipping. So bring us a clear authority [evidence]. Their messengers said to them: We are only men like you, but Allah confers favour upon whom He wills of His servants. It has never been for us to bring you evidence, except by permission of Allah. Upon Allah let the believers rely — and why should we not rely upon Allah while He has guided us to our [good] ways? We will surely be patient against whatever harm you should cause us, and upon Allah let those who would rely [indeed] rely.﴾ (Qur'an 14: 9-12)

The prophets and the messengers are the finest examples of patience, righteousness, and reliance upon Allah.

FRUITS OF RIGHTEOUS COPING

As for those who attempt to implement the Islamic methodology for coping during times of trials and tribulations (as outlined above), Allah will bestow upon them various fruits (or benefits) for their labour and efforts. Allah does not need us; rather, we need Him. When we employ righteous methods for coping, this is ultimately for our own benefit.

A way out of every difficulty

Allah promises us that if we turn to Him and rely upon Him during times of difficulty and need, He will make a way out and relieve us of our distress. As discussed in an earlier section, Allah responds to the supplications of His servants and assists them with their every need. He also promises that every difficulty will be followed by ease. Allah is able to remove even the most difficult of challenges in life, just as He did for Jonah, who was confined in the belly of the whale; for the three men who were trapped in the cave by a large boulder; and for Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), whom the leaders of Quraysh conspired to murder. Allah mentions:

﴿أَمَّنْ يُجِيبُ الْمُضْطَرَّ إِذَا دَعَاهُ وَيَكْشِفُ السُّوءَ وَيَجْعَلُكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ الْأَرْضِ ۗ
أَوَّلَهُ مَعَ اللَّهِ...﴾ (سورة النمل: ٦٢)

«Is He [not best] who responds to the desperate one when he calls upon Him and removes evil and makes you inheritors of the earth?
Is there a deity with Allah...?» (Qur'an 27: 62)

Allah is the One Who willed that the calamity and tribulation would occur, and it is only He Who will remove it. All the favours

and all the harm that we experience in this life ultimately occur with the permission of Allah.

﴿وَإِنْ يَمَسُّكَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ فَلَا كَاشِفَ لَهُ إِلَّا هُوَ وَإِنْ يُرِدْكَ بِخَيْرٍ فَلَا رَادَّ لِفَضْلِهِ يُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾ (سورة يونس: ١٠٧)

And if Allah should touch you with adversity, there is no remover of it except Him; and if He intends for you good, then there is no repeller of His bounty. He causes it to reach whom He wills of His servants. He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. (Qur'an 10: 107)

﴿وَإِنْ يَمَسُّكَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ فَلَا كَاشِفَ لَهُ إِلَّا هُوَ وَإِنْ يَمَسُّكَ بِخَيْرٍ فَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ﴾ (سورة الأنعام: ١٨) ﴿وَهُوَ الْقَاهِرُ فَوْقَ عِبَادِهِ وَهُوَ الْحَكِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ﴾ (سورة الأنعام: ١٨)

And if Allah should touch you with adversity, there is no remover of it except Him, and if He touches you with good — then He is over all things competent. He is the subjugator over His servants, and He is the Wise, the Acquainted [with all]. (Qur'an 6: 17-18)

Allah provides special assistance to those who have taqwâ and who rely upon Him alone for all of their needs.

﴿... وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا وَيَرْزُقْهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بَلِغُ أَمْرِهِ قَدْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدْرًا﴾ (سورة الطلاق: ٢-٣)

...And whosoever fears Allah and keeps his duty to Him, He will make for him a way out [of every difficulty] and will provide for him from where he does not expect. Whoever relies upon Allah — then He is sufficient for him. Indeed, Allah will accomplish His purpose. Allah has already set for everything a [decreed] extent. (Qur'an 65: 2-3)

﴿... وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِ يُسْرًا﴾ (سورة الطلاق: ٤-٥) ﴿ذَلِكَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ أَنْزَلَهُ إِلَيْنَا وَاللَّهُ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ بِكُفْرٍ عَنْهُ سِتَاتِهِ وَيُعْظِمُ لَهُ أَجْرًا﴾ (سورة الطلاق: ٤-٥)

...And whoever fears Allah — He will make for him of his matter ease. That is the command of Allah, which He has sent down to you; and whoever fears Allah — He will remove for him his misdeeds and make great for him his reward. (Qur'an 65: 4-5)

These verses mean that for those who fear Allah, Allah will ease their situation and bring forth relief from the trials that they may be experiencing. Not only that, but He will also expiate their sins and multiply their rewards. This is the promise of Allah, and He never fails to fulfil His promise.

Victory and succession upon the earth

Scanning the history of the Ummah, it can be seen that victory and power are connected to purity in 'aqeedah, sincerity to Allah, following the path of the Prophet (ﷺ), and uniting behind the leaders. Subjugation, humiliation, and weakness are connected to deviation and innovation in religion, taking partners and rivals with Allah, and disobedience and rebellion against the leaders.¹⁵⁰

﴿قَالَ مُوسَى لِقَوْمِهِ اسْتَعِينُوا بِاللَّهِ وَأَصْبِرُوا إِنَّ الْأَرْضَ لِلَّهِ يُورِثُهَا مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ﴾ (سورة الأعراف: ١٢٨)

Said Moses to his people: Seek help through Allah, and be patient. Indeed, the earth belongs to Allah. He causes to inherit it Whom He wills of His servants, and the [best] outcome is for the righteous. (Qur'an 7: 128)

﴿وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَى لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا وَمَنْ كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ﴾ (سورة النور: ٥٥)

¹⁵⁰ al-Athari, *A Brief Introduction to the Aqidah of Ahl as-Sunnah*, 21.

«Allah has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession [to authority] upon the earth, just as He granted it to those before them, and that He will surely establish for them [therein] their religion, which He has preferred for them, and that He will surely substitute for them, after their fear, security, [for] they worship Me, not associating anything with Me. But whoever disbelieves after that — then those are the defiantly disobedient.» (Qur'an 24: 55)

This verse indicates that the key to success, security and contentment is the implementation of tawḥeed in one's life. Tawḥeed is the key to all that is good in this life, whereas shirk is the key to all evil. This is further emphasized in the following verse:

«الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَلَمْ يَلْبِسُوا إِيمَانَهُمْ بِظُلْمٍ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمُ الْأَمْنُ وَهُمْ مُهْتَدُونَ» (سورة الأنعام: ٨٢)

(سورة الأنعام: ٨٢)

«They who believe and do not mix their belief with injustice — those will have security, and they are [rightly] guided.» (Qur'an 6: 82)

The injustice or wrong referred to in this verse means associating others with Allah in divinity or worship. Allah promises that He will support the believers in this life and provide them with security and victory:

«إِنَّا لَنَنْصُرُ رُسُلَنَا وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ يَقُومُ الْأَشْهَادُ» (سورة غافر: ٥١)

(سورة غافر: ٥١)

«Indeed, we will support [and make victorious] Our messengers and those who believe, during the life of this world and on the day when the witnesses will stand.» (Qur'an 40: 51)

«يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن نَّصُرُوا اللَّهَ يَنْصُرْكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَكُمْ» (سورة محمد: ٧)

«O you who have believed, if you support [in the cause of] Allah, He will support you and plant firmly your feet.» (Qur'an 47: 7)

«...وَلَيَنْصُرَنَّ اللَّهُ مَن يَنْصُرُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ» (سورة الحج: ٤٠-٤١)

«...And Allah will surely support those who support Him [His cause]. Indeed, Allah is Powerful and Exalted in Might. [And they are] those who, if We give them authority in the land, establish prayer and give charity and enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. To Allah belongs the outcomes of [all] matters.» (Qur'an 22: 40-41)

In the preceding verses, Allah points out that those who support His cause, by propagating the teachings of Islam and fighting for His sake, will receive His support and His assistance. In addition, Allah reminds the believers that He is All-Powerful and Exalted in Might, to the extent that nothing can overpower or overwhelm Him. Whoever has the help of Allah truly does not need any other assistance, for there is no greater support or power that one can attain, particularly in relation to defeating an enemy. Allah mentions:

«وَاذْكُرُوا إِذْ أَنْتُمْ مُسْتَضْعَفُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ تَخَافُونَ أَنْ يَخَطَفَكُمْ النَّاسُ فَتَأْوِنَكُمْ وَآيِدُكُمْ بِنَصْرِهِ وَرِزْقِكُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ» (سورة الأنفال: ٢٦)

(سورة الأنفال: ٢٦)

«And remember when you were few and oppressed in the land, fearing that people might abduct you, but He sheltered you, supported you with His victory, and provided you with good things — that you might be grateful.» (Qur'an 8: 26)

This particular verse was revealed in relation to the Muslim community at the time of the Prophet (ﷺ). In Makkah, the believers were few and were forced to practice their religion secretly, out of fear of oppression, torture, and kidnapping. Later in the Prophet's mission, Allah opened the door for the Muslims to migrate to Madinah, where

they found support, security, and freedom to practice their religion. Allah reminds the believers of His blessings and favours upon them: they were few, and He increased their numbers; they were weak and frightened, and He brought them safety, strength, and victory; they were poor and lowly, and He provided them with sustenance and blessings. The greatest favour of all was that He made Islam dominant on the earth such that the Muslims became the leaders.¹⁵¹

«Abu Bakr as-Şiddeeq (رضي الله عنه) said: When the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and I were in the cave of Thawr and I saw the feet of the polytheists who were above us at the mouth of the cave, I said: O Messenger of Allah! If one of them were to look down at his feet, he would see us. He said: Abu Bakr, what do you think of the two whose third is Allah?» (Bukhari and Muslim)

This support from Allah was there for other messengers as well.

﴿وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ رُسُلًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِمْ فَجَاءَهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَأَنْتَقَمْنَا مِنَ الَّذِينَ أَجْرَمُوا وَكَانَ حَقًّا عَلَيْنَا نَصْرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾ (سورة الروم: ٤٧)

«And We have already sent messengers before you to their peoples, and they came to them with clear evidences; then We took retribution from those who committed crimes, and incumbent upon Us was support [aid or victory] of the believers.» (Qur'an 30: 47)

﴿وَلَقَدْ سَبَقَتْ كَلِمَتُنَا لِعِبَادِنَا الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿١٧١﴾ إِنَّهُمْ لَهُمُ الْمَنْصُورُونَ ﴿١٧٢﴾ وَإِنَّ جُنَدَنَا لَهُمُ الْغَالِبُونَ ﴿١٧٣﴾﴾ (سورة الصافات: ١٧١-١٧٣)

«And Our word [decree] has already preceded for Our servants, the messengers. Indeed, they would be those given victory, and indeed, Our soldiers [the believers] will be those who overcome.»

(Qur'an 37: 171-173)

Muhammad ibn 'Abdul-Wahhâb states in reference to this verse:

¹⁵¹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 4:293.

But if you turn to Allah and submit to the arguments of Allah and their exposition, then you should not fear or grieve. Verily, the plot of Satan is weak. A commoner from the true monotheists can overcome one thousand of the scholars of those polytheists... The soldiers of Allah overcome others through proofs and speech in the same way that they overcome them with swords...¹⁵²

This demonstrates the true power of belief, and in particular, the power of belief in tawhîd. The believers will defeat the disbelievers in various ways (including speech, logic, and strength), and the message of truth will prevail. There are many examples of this throughout history, such as when Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) gained control of Makkah from the disbelievers and Islam spread throughout the region. This reality is also detailed in the following Qur'anic verses:

﴿لَقَدْ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ يُبَايِعُونَكَ تَحْتَ الشَّجَرَةِ فَعَلِمَ مَا فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ فَأَنزَلَ السَّكِينَةَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَثَبَهُمْ فَتْحًا قَرِيبًا ﴿١٨﴾ وَمَغَانِمَ كَثِيرَةً يَأْخُذُونَهَا وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا ﴿١٩﴾ وَعَدَكُمْ اللَّهُ مَغَانِمَ كَثِيرَةً تَأْخُذُونَهَا فَعَجَّلَ لَكُمْ هَذِهِ وَكَفَّ أَيْدِيَ النَّاسِ عَنْكُمْ وَلِتَكُونَ ءَايَةً لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَيَهْدِيَكُمْ صِرَاطًا مُسْتَقِيمًا ﴿٢٠﴾ وَأُخْرَىٰ لَمْ تَقْدِرُوا عَلَيْهَا قَدْ أَحَاطَ اللَّهُ بِهَا وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرًا ﴿٢١﴾﴾ (سورة الفتح: ١٨-٢١)

«Certainly was Allah pleased with the believers when they pledged allegiance to you [O Muhammad] under the tree. He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down tranquillity upon them and rewarded them with an imminent conquest [Khaybar, which preceded the conquest of Makkah], and much war booty, which they will take. Ever is Allah Exalted in Might and Wise. Allah has promised you much booty that you will take [in the future] and has hastened for you this [victory]

¹⁵² Zarabozo, *The Life, Teachings and Influence of Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhab*, 130.

and withheld the hands of people from you — that it may be a sign for the believers and [that] He may guide you to a straight path. And [He promises] other [victories] that you were [so far] unable to [realize], which Allah has already encompassed [prepared for you or decreed]. Ever is Allah, over all things, competent. ﴿ (Qur'an 48: 18-21)

In his explanation of these verses, Ibn Katheer states that Allah has made these incidents with the Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companions signs so that the believers may comprehend and take heed. The message is that Allah will assist and protect the believers against all enemies, even though they may be few. Knowing this, the believers will appreciate that Allah knows the consequences of all matters and that He makes the best decisions for His servants.¹⁵³ Ibn Katheer goes on to explain, regarding 'other [victories]':

Meaning, there are other war spoils and victories to come which are not within your grasp now. However, Allah will make them within your reach and indeed He compasses all these victories for your benefit. Surely, Allah the Exalted provides provisions and sustenance for His servants who have *taqwa*, from resources they could never imagine.¹⁵⁴

Some scholars interpret 'other [victories]' to mean every victory until the Day of Resurrection.¹⁵⁵ In order for victory to be achieved, the belief must be true and sincere. Allah explains:

﴿وَلَا تَهِنُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَنْتُمُ الْأَعْلَوْنَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾ (سورة آل عمران: ١٣٩)

«So do not weaken and do not grieve, and you will be superior if you are [true] believers.﴾ (Qur'an 3: 139)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) stated that this reality would continue until the Day of Judgement.

¹⁵³ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 9:150.

¹⁵⁴ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 9:151.

¹⁵⁵ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 9:152.

«There shall always remain a group from my Ummah, apparent upon the truth, until the Command of Allah comes and they are apparent.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

The Arabic word translated here as 'apparent' is translated by some scholars as 'victorious'; both meanings could be inferred. The Messenger (ﷺ) also said:

«There shall always remain a group from my Ummah, upholding the affair of Allah, not being harmed by those who seek to mislead them, nor by those who oppose them, until the Command of Allah comes and they are upon that.» (Bukhari and Muslim)

In the story of Muhammad ibn 'Abdul-Wahhâb, we find a more recent example of such support and success. Throughout his call to Islam and to tawhîd, he suffered many trials and tribulations, but Allah made him and his followers victorious. By the time of his death, his teachings had spread throughout Najd and most of al-Ahsâ (two areas in Saudi Arabia). In addition to explaining the true meaning of tawhîd to the people, 'Abdul-Wahhâb physically removed the false idols and places of worship that had been established (such as graves or trees referred to as 'holy sites'). Since then, there has not been any such site in Najd, even though the area was filled with these sites before his time.¹⁵⁶

Even after his death, his teachings continued to spread and have an influence that exists until this very day.¹⁵⁷ This impact is found in his original homeland, where his own descendants (and others) continue to preach the message of tawhîd, as well as in many other parts of the Muslim world.¹⁵⁸ 'Abdul-Wahhâb's mission was successful, by

¹⁵⁶ Zarabozo, *The Life, Teachings and Influence of Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhab*, 136.

¹⁵⁷ Zarabozo, *The Life, Teachings and Influence of Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhab*, 54.

¹⁵⁸ Zarabozo, *The Life, Teachings and Influence of Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhab*, 161.

the grace and blessings of Allah, due to his sincere efforts to eradicate polytheism and replace it with pristine tawḥeed, to enjoin good and forbid evil, and to establish a just society.

Sometimes Allah delays the victory for a wisdom that He perceives and for causes that He knows, although these may not be apparent to His servants.

﴿حَتَّىٰ إِذَا اسْتَيْسَسَ الرُّسُلُ وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُمْ قَدْ كُذِّبُوا جَاءَهُمْ نَصْرُنَا فَنُجِّيَ مَنْ نَشَاءُ وَلَا يُرَدُّ بَأْسُنَا عَنِ الْقَوْمِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ﴾
(سورة يوسف: ١١٠)

«[They continued] until, when the messengers despaired and were certain that they had been denied, there came to them Our victory, and whoever We willed was saved. Our punishment cannot be repelled from the people who are criminals.» (Qur'an 12: 110)

The victory for the believers occurs in this world, and the greatest victory will be attained in the hereafter. Allah also mentions this reality in another verse:

﴿إِنَّا لَنَنْصُرُ رُسُلَنَا وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ يَقُومُ الْأَشْهَادُ﴾
(سورة غافر: ٥١)

«Indeed, We will support Our messengers and those who believe, during the life of this world and on the day when the witnesses will stand.» (Qur'an 40: 51)

Abu Moosâ (رضي الله عنه) narrated:

«The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: Abu Moosâ, should I not guide you to one of the treasures of the (many) treasures of paradise?

I (Abu Moosâ) asked: What is that?

He replied: There is no might or power except by Allah.» (Bukhari and Abu Dâwood)

Goodness and contentment in this life

Righteous coping provides many benefits during stressful times and ultimately leads to goodness and contentment in this life. This is another promise that Allah has made for his virtuous servants.

﴿مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُم بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾
(سورة النحل: ٩٧)

«Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer — We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do.» (Qur'an 16: 97)

﴿قُلْ يٰٓعِبَادِ اللّٰهِ اٰمِنُوْا اَنْتُمْ اَنْتُمْ اَنْتُمْ اَحْسَنُوْا فِيْ هٰذِهِ الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَّاَرْضُ اللّٰهِ وٰسِعَةٌ اِنَّمَا يُوَفَّى الصّٰبِرُوْنَ اَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ﴾
(سورة الزمر: ١٠)

«Say: O My servants who have believed, fear your Lord. For those who do good in this world is good, and the earth of Allah is spacious. Indeed, the patient will be given their reward without account [limit].»

(Qur'an 39: 10)

Goodness entails a sense of happiness, tranquillity and contentment in all aspects of life, during times of ease as well as during times of hardship. It has also been interpreted to mean good and lawful provisions. Aḍ-Ḍaḥḥāk states, "It means working to obey Allah and finding joy in that."¹⁵⁹

﴿قَالَ اٰمِطًا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ فَاِمَّا يٰٓاٰلِنَّكَم مِّنْ هٰٓؤُلَاءِ فَمَنْ اَتَّبَعَ هٰٓؤُلَاءِ فَلَا يَضِلُّ وَلَا يَشْقٰى﴾
(سورة طه: ١٢٣)

«[Allah] said: Descend from paradise, all, [your descendants] being enemies to one another. If there should come to you guidance from

¹⁵⁹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 5:523-524.

Me — then whoever follows my guidance will neither go astray [in the world] nor suffer [in the hereafter].» (Qur'an 20: 123)

This verse mentions that those who follow the guidance sent by Allah will not go astray, nor will they grieve or be distressed. The opposite of distress is happiness, felicity, success, and prosperity. The provision of right guidance is the greatest of blessings, but Allah also provides other bounties to increase the happiness and joy experienced by the believers.

During trials and tribulations, righteous coping provides a source of comfort and a means of healing from traumatic experiences. It offers a sense of hope and optimism, and it provides meaning and purpose to seemingly incomprehensible events. Righteous coping provides a framework for accepting the limits of our own personal knowledge, control, and resources, as well as a means to 'transcend' the experience. Ultimately, it leads one to experience the bliss and heaven of this world.

The heaven of this world

There is a heaven in this world. If you were to experience it, you would think that there is no bliss that could possibly surpass it. If only we could experience a small taste of that heaven! What exactly is this heaven in the world? Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah writes:

I heard the Shaykh of Islam, Ibn Taymiyya, say: Truly, there is a Heaven in this world, [and] whoever does not enter it, will not enter the Heaven of the next world. And once he said to me: What can my enemies do to me? I have in my breast both my Heaven and my garden. If I travel they are with me, and they never leave me. Imprisonment for me is a religious retreat [*khalwa*]. To be slain for me is martyrdom [*shahada*], and to be exiled from my land is a spiritual journey...¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Ibn Qayyim, *The Invocation of God*, 57.

During his imprisonment in the fortress, he would say: I could not be more grateful for this blessing were I to have this entire fortress in gold; or: I could never repay them for the good that has come to me in [this prison]. And in prostration he would say: O Allah, help me in my gratitude to You, remembrance of You and the most comely worship of You, Allah Willing.¹⁶¹

Allah knows, I have never seen anyone who had a better life than his. Despite the difficulties and all that expunges comfort and luxury, nay, things completely opposite to them; despite imprisonment, intimidation and oppression, Ibn Taymiyya had a purer life than anyone could. He was the most generous, the strongest of heart and most joyful of soul, with 'the radiance of bliss' in his face. When we were seized with fear and our thoughts [about Allah's decree] turned negative, and the earth grew narrow for us, we would go to him. No sooner did we look at him and hear his words than all these [feelings] would leave us, to be replaced by relief, strength, certainty and tranquility. So glory be to the One who lets His servants witness His Heaven well before they meet Him, who opens its doors to them in this world of deeds and who gives them something of its refreshment, its breeze and its perfume — that they may seek it and hasten towards it with all their strength.¹⁶²

Ibn Qayyim also states:

To love Allah, to know Him ultimately, to remember Him constantly, to find peace and rest in Him, to make Him alone the [ultimate] object of love, fear, hope and trust; to base one's act on His control of His servant's cares, aspirations and will — such is the world's Heaven, and such is a blessing with which no other blessing can compare. It is by this that the hearts of those who

¹⁶¹ Ibn Qayyim, *The Invocation of God*, 58.

¹⁶² Ibn Qayyim, *The Invocation of God*, 58.

love Allah are gladdened and that the [a]gnostics find life. As their hearts are gladdened by Allah, so others are gladdened by them. For whoever finds his source of gladness in Allah, gladdens all hearts; whoever does not, finds nothing in this world but restlessness.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Ibn Qayyim, *The Invocation of God*, 59.

CONCLUSION

*T*rials and tribulations are the inevitable facts of our existence in this worldly life. Allah tests human beings to determine whether we will choose to submit to His commandments or follow our own whims and desires. He tests us to see if the faith that we proclaim is truly rooted in our hearts or whether it will blow away with the slightest of breezes. Is our love of Him, trust in Him, and reliance upon Him unconditional, or is it based upon the attainment of ease and bounties in this life?

Whatever trials and hardships we have endured during our existence in this worldly life and during our servitude to Allah are all part of His plan to ensure our ultimate success. We must not become heedless of the fact that each trial and tribulation contains within it the potential for spiritual growth, purification, and rewards, and that these can only be attained through patience, which in turn can only be achieved through strong faith and determination. Patience, contentment and gratitude, in fact, are our responsibilities as slaves of Allah.

All human beings experience tribulations. However, the believers benefit the most from these tribulations, due to the faith with which Allah has blessed them; they are pleased with what Allah has decreed, and they perceive the wisdom in it. Because they remain patient in the midst of trials and rely upon Allah while seeking His reward, their sins are erased, they receive abundant rewards, and their status is raised in the hereafter.

Since the hereafter is the main goal of the believers, understanding the realities of trials and tribulations will help them to be patient,

content, and even grateful to Allah. Remembering the temporal nature of this worldly life, along with the benefits that may be gained from trials, helps to ease the burden. Ultimately, trials and tribulations bring benefits for those who attempt to implement the guidelines that have been presented in this book. Such individuals will thus have the hope of earning rewards from Allah for submitting to Him and to the events that He has planned in their lives.

Each and every tribulation contains a lesson within it. Take a close look at the tribulations in your life today. What message is being sent to you? What lesson do you need to learn? What do you need to change within yourself? How can you propel yourself to the next level of spiritual development? What are the means through which you can purify your soul? How do you reach the status of being among those who experience the heaven of this world as well as the heaven of the hereafter? How do you reach the level of those who, at the time of death, will hear the words, "Peace be upon you"?

﴿الَّذِينَ تَوْفَّيْنَاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ طَيِّبِينَ يَقُولُونَ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ ادْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ

(سورة النحل: ٣٢)

﴿The ones whom the angels take in death, [being] good and pure; [the angels] will say: Peace be upon you. Enter paradise for what you used to do.﴾

(Qur'an 16: 32)

Know, O believer, that life is destined to be the one where every moment entails struggling and striving until you reach your grave; know that paradise can never be found in what surrounds you; rather, it is found within yourself, within the heart. It is the relationship with your Creator, Provider and Sustainer that provides you with a sense of peace and security that cannot be achieved by any other means; it can only be attained by turning to Allah in repentance, supplication, reliance, and hope.

Hence, while the world appears dark before your eyes and seems to 'crumble' around you, and the trials and the tribulations overwhelm

you like waves, hold on to your belief in Allah and in what He has promised you, which includes relief, ease, faith, and generous rewards. Remember that there will come a time when these worldly trials will be no more. Once we are in our graves, after the last pile of dirt is thrown upon us and our loved ones walk away, the tests of this life will have come to a halt. It is then that we will obtain the recompense of our responses to the trials that we experienced, either taking pleasure in the bounties of Allah or suffering His punishment.

We ask Allah to grant us protection from the trials and the tribulations of life, and to bestow upon us patience, fortitude and wisdom in bearing those that come our way. May He purify our souls, expiate our sins, and increase our spiritual level. May he make us among the successful ones who learn the lessons of tribulations and take them to heart. May He reward us with His paradise in the hereafter and with the pleasure of seeing His face — the ultimate recompense. May He save us from His wrath and from the punishment of the hellfire, âmeen.

As one of our pious predecessors said, "Were it not for the calamities of the world, we would come empty-handed on the Day of Resurrection."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Ibn Qayyim, *Zâd al-Ma'âd*.

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APPENDIX — NAMES OF ALLAH MENTIONED IN THE TEXT

| Transliteration | English Translation | Arabic Name |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|-------------|
| Allah | He Who Deserves to be Worshipped | الله |
| al-'Adl | The Just | العدل |
| al-'Azeez | The Exalted in Might | العزيز |
| al-Ghaffâr | The Perpetual Forgiver | الغفار |
| al-Ghafoor | The Forgiving | الغفور |
| al-Haleem | The Forbearing | الحليم |
| al-Haseeb | The Reckoner | الحسيب |
| al-Jabbâr | The Compeller | الجبار |
| al-Khâfiḍ | The Abaser, The One Who Lowers | الخافض |
| al-Mudhill | The One Who humbles | المذل |
| al-Muḥaymin | The Overseer | المهيمن |
| al-Mujeeb | The Responsive | المجيب |
| al-Qadeer | The All-Powerful | القدير |
| al-Qaḥḥâr | The Prevailing | القهار |
| ar-Raḥeem | The Most Merciful | الرحيم |
| ar-Raḥmân | The Most Gracious | الرحمن |

GLOSSARY OF ISLAMIC TERMS*

| | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|---|
| <i>abu (or abi)</i> | أبو، أبي | father (of) |
| <i>ahl as-Sunnah wal-jamâ'ah</i> | أهل السنة والجماعة | 'people of the Sunnah and the community' |
| <i>âmeen</i> | آمين | O Allah, accept our invocation; amen |
| <i>angel</i> | | A being made of light who is totally obedient to Allah and has no free will; Allah has assigned some angels specific tasks, like those who record our good and bad deeds, the Angel of Death, the guardians of hell, etc. |
| <i>Anṣâr</i> | أنصار | 'helpers': the Muslim citizens of Madinah who gave refuge to the Prophet (ﷺ) and the other Muslim emigrants from Makkah |
| <i>'aqeedah (pl. 'aqâ'id)</i> | عقيدة | belief system that is based upon a firm conviction in all the fundamentals of faith and of the oneness of Allah; firm creed that one's heart is fixed upon without any wavering or doubt, and that excludes any supposition, doubt or suspicion |
| <i>Dajjâl</i> | الدجال | Antichrist (anti-Christ) |

* The Arabic words are transliterated according to the conventions of the Transliteration Chart found in this book. If a word has become part of the English language (i.e., is found in a dictionary of Standard English), that spelling is used in this book and appears first in this Glossary, with the transliterated form in brackets after it.

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|--|
| <i>firdaws</i> | فردوس | The highest level of paradise |
| <i>fitnah</i> (pl. <i>fitan</i>) | فتنة | <i>lit.</i> trial, temptation; (attempting to sow) discord between Muslims |
| <i>fiṭrah</i> | فطرة | the natural inclination (of humans) instilled by Allah |
| Hadith (<i>ḥadeeth</i>) | حديث | the collected statements and actions of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that with the Qur'an form the basis of Islamic law |
| hadith (<i>ḥadeeth</i>) | حديث | a statement or action of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that was remembered and recorded by his Companions and followers |
| <i>hadith qudsi</i> | حديث قدسي | 'sacred hadith': a hadith communicated to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) by Allah, but that is not part of the Qur'an |
| <i>ḥaraj</i> | خرج | killing |
| <i>Iblees</i> | إبليس | another name for Satan in Arabic |
| <i>jamâ'ah</i> | جماعة | main group of Muslims |
| <i>jihād (jihād)</i> | جهاد | struggle or striving (in Allah's cause) |
| <i>jinn</i> (sg. <i>jinni</i>) | جن | non-human, rational beings created by Allah from fire, often referred to as 'demons' or 'devils'. They have free will like humans: some are Muslims, others disbelievers; some are obedient to Allah, others disobedient. Satan is a jinni. Some people try to 'foretell' the future by contacting a jinni. Some disobedient jinn mislead people into thinking that they can tell them what will happen in the future, near or far, or that the jinn can provide people with riches or some sort of power. |

| | | |
|---|---------|--|
| Kaaba (<i>Ka'bah</i>) | الكعبة | the House of Allah in Makkah, originally built by Prophets Abraham and Ishmael, and which Muslims face wherever they pray |
| <i>Muhājireen</i> | مهاجرون | the Muslims who migrated with Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) from Makkah to Madinah |
| <i>mujāhid</i> (pl. <i>mujāhideen</i>) | مجاهد | one who strives in the way of Allah; a fighter in jihad |
| <i>muṣeebah</i> | المصيبة | pl. <i>maṣā'ib</i> or <i>muṣeebāt</i> ; misfortune, calamity, disaster |
| <i>muṣ-ḥaf</i> | مصحف | a copy of the Arabic text of the Qur'an that is neither accompanied by commentary nor translated |
| prophethood | | The term 'prophethood' is not in the English dictionary, but is an invented term, formed along the pattern of 'childhood' and 'motherhood', as a noun reflecting a particular state of being. It is meant to translate the meaning of the Arabic word <i>nubuwwah</i> , which has no one-word equivalent in English, but which could be translated as meaning 'the state of being a prophet', and is also used to refer to 'all things that have to do with being a prophet'. The term 'prophethood' has since become common in English-language Islamic discourse. (Editor) |
| <i>qadr</i> | القدر | divine predestination; destiny; power; exact measure |

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------|---|
| <i>Quraysh</i> | قريش | the dominant tribe in Makkah at the time of the Prophet's mission; their society was based on polytheism |
| Ramadan (<i>Ramaḍân</i>) | رمضان | the ninth month in the Islamic calendar; the month of obligatory fasting; the month in which the first verses of the Qur'an were revealed |
| <i>ruqyah</i> (pl. <i>ruqâ</i>) | الرقية | to recite a part of the Qur'an (such as <i>Soorat al-Fâtiḥah</i>) or to supplicate to Allah using words prescribed by the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) in authentic hadiths in order to obtain relief from illness |
| <i>salaf</i> | السلف | the pious predecessors: the earliest generations of the righteous followers of Islam |
| Sharia (<i>shari'ah</i>) | شريعة | Islamic law derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah |
| <i>shirk</i> | الشرك | associating partners with Allah |
| <i>soorah</i> or <i>soorat</i> | سورة | chapter of the Qur'an |
| Sunnah | سنة | the practice and collected sayings of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that together with the Qur'an forms the basis of Islamic law |
| <i>sunnah</i> | سنة | acts that are recommended but not mandatory |
| <i>tâghoot</i> | طاغوت | idols; everything evil that is worshipped |

| | | |
|----------------|---------|---|
| <i>taqwâ</i> | التقوى | fearful awareness of Allah; being mindful of Allah; pious dedication; being careful not to transgress the bounds set by Allah |
| <i>tawḥeed</i> | التوحيد | the Oneness of Allah: that He alone deserves to be worshipped and that He has no partners |
| Ummah | أمة | community or nation: <i>usu.</i> used to refer to the entire global community of Muslims |

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NOTES

NOTES

[illegible]

The times in which we are living are fraught with wars, natural disasters, and various other tribulations, in addition to the ongoing struggles within our own souls. This book will help the reader to understand the logic of events in a seemingly chaotic world, to comprehend the rationale for seemingly unbearable trials and tribulations, and to implement sound Islamic methodology in finding the most effective coping techniques.

The book's title was inspired by a saying of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ):

"Every fatigue, illness, distress, worry, grief, or harm that befalls the Muslim, including **the prick of a thorn**, will be accepted by Allah as expiation for some of his or her sins." (*Bukhari*)

Appreciating the wisdom and mercy associated with each trial that we face is the first step toward beneficial coping. Ultimately, tribulations should lead to increased servitude to the Creator, an appreciation of the bounties that He has bestowed upon us, and a level of spirituality that allows us to transcend the challenges that we face.

About the author

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